Virtuosity, charisma, and social order

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Virtuosity, charisma, and social order

A comparative sociological study of monasticism in Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism

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In memory of my father
who taught me the reality of ideals
and to my mother
who taught me her love for the world of ideas

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Preface

One of the true rewards in bringing this book to its completion is the opportunity to properly acknowledge intellectual debts incurred along the way. My greatest debt is to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, who first introduced me to the ambitious horizons of comparative historical sociology in general and to the importance of religious traditions in the dynamics of civilizations in particular. His influence on my work goes much beyond the explicit references to his writings in either the body of the text or the footnotes – although I am well aware that he would have handled the topic in a very different manner. I have also had the privilege of benefiting from the encyclopedic knowledge and prodding guidance of R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, one of the very few true comparativists in the study of religion. Stanley J. Tambiah's rich amalgam of anthropological, historical, and macrosociological traditions of analysis first triggered my interest in Theravada Buddhism. His encouragement at an early stage bolstered my confidence to undertake the dauting task of juggling many different worlds of scholarship. I wish to put on record my deep gratitude to Steven Collins, who commented on two earlier versions of the manuscript and, above all, lent me precious intellectual support at times when the cost of crossing the boundaries of disciplines and fields of expertise seemed to become overwhelming. I also thank Michael Carrithers, as well as an anonymous reader, whose critical comments spurred me on to produce what I hope is a better book. Jessica Kuper's commitment to the book and friendly handling of the publishing process greatly helped me bring the manuscript to its final form.

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I also wish to acknowledge the support I received from various institutions: a doctoral grant from the Israel Research Foundation that enabled me to complete the dissertation on which the book is based; a Pearlman

fellowship from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Hebrew University that sponsored my postdoctoral work in the department of Anthropology at Harvard University; and the repeated financial support I received as a fellow researcher at the Truman Institute, which also kindly financed editorial work on the manuscript. Many parts of this book have been written in the library of the Van Leer Institute, a unique haven of cultural and intellectual life in Jerusalem, and I am grateful to the institute's director, Yehuda Elkana, for his steady hospitality.

Finally, this book may well not have come to completion without the unfailing confidence of Michael Silber, who shared with me, as both husband and historian, this prolonged experience in academic single-mindedness and asceticism. Romy and Mika lent their precious presence and, luckily, never let me completely submit to the virtuoso imperative.

Introduction

Writing about the ascetic type, Nietzsche observed: "It must be a necessity of the first order that again and again promotes the growth and prosperity of this life-inimical species. It must indeed be in the interest of life itself that such a self-contradictory type does not die out. . . . 'Triumph in the ultimate agony': the ascetic ideal has always fought under this hyperbolic sign."[1] It is the "triumph" of the ascetic that will form the main concern of this book.

Although the social bases and implications of religious ideals have been classic topics of sociological debate, one important and closely related theme has not received its due attention: that minority of "virtuosi," as Max Weber called them, who gear their lives to a superior enactment of religious ideals. I propose to expand upon this neglected strand of Weberian sociology and examine the social position of these religious virtuosi from a comparative and macrosociological perspective. More specifically, I intend to focus on historical settings in which virtuoso elites achieved considerable prestige and ascendancy, or in Nietzsche's apt metaphor, where they attained a paradoxical form of "triumph."

The inquiry will concentrate on a distinct type of religious virtuosi – hermits and monks – in two civilizations in which they became especially prominent: traditional Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism. At one level, therefore, the present work may be read as a comparative sociological study of monasticism. Beyond this, however, it also aims at a more inclusive understanding of religious virtuosity (of which monasticism is only one, if a crucial, form of expression) in its historical interaction with different social orders. Although the notion of virtuosity itself, originally taken from the arts, is frequently encountered in Weber's writings, it seems to have been read as no more than a suggestive metaphor and has been left largely unexplored. Weber's work remains the only sociological treatment of the subject, and there has been little attempt – with the important exception of Michael Hill's study of religious orders in nineteenth-century England[2] – to analyze religious virtuosi as a distinctive sociological type.

This neglect may seem surprising in light of the long-standing socio-

[1] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* translated and edited by W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), pp. 117–18 (essay 3, section 2).

[2] M. Hill, *The Religious Order: A Study of Virtuoso Religion and its Legitimation in the Nineteenth Century Church of England* (London: Heineman, 1973).

logical concern with religious phenomena in general, and religious specialists and institutions in particular.[3] It is less surprising, however, given the natural tendency of social scientists to be drawn to religious figures of more obvious historical and social significance – such as priests, prophets, and charismatic leaders – who often enjoy a widespread appeal, and at times even possess a dramatic potential for effecting far-reaching social transformations. Although religious virtuosity is not without affinities to these forms of religious leadership, it clearly addresses itself only to a restricted minority, a "spiritual aristocracy" in Weber's words. Furthermore, this aristocratic minority has often been associated with a tendency to spiritual inwardness and social withdrawal, seemingly of little interest to all but those specializing in the sociology of religion in the narrow sense of the word.

In this work, however, religious virtuosity will be shown to form not only a specific type of religious orientation – and not merely the characteristic of a religious minority – but also a cultural variable of far-reaching macrosociological significance. I shall first address the overall social position of religious virtuosi as closely related to and shaped by specific features of their macrosocietal context. A second, complementary focus will be the development of a whole cluster of processes – what I term a "virtuoso complex" – that came to form a macrostructure of central importance in traditional Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism, the two historical settings selected for comparison.

Analyzing this "complex," I suggest, may add a new angle to the analysis of the part played by religious ideology and structures in the dynamics of macrosocietal formations. Although this is, of course, an old, classical sociological issue, it has been forcefully revived in a recent flurry of works that have all preoccupied themselves once again with the issue of the emergence of capitalism and the "rise of the West."[4] Symptomatic of a remarkable spurt of revival in historical macrocomparative sociology in which neo-Marxist, world-systemic, and state-theory approaches have been very influential during the last decade or so, these studies have also

[3] In the humanities, in contrast, the search for religious rigor and spiritual perfection has received ample and distinguished treatment. For an unsurpassed overview, see J. Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (London: Duckworth, 1970).

[4] See in particular D. Chirot, "The Rise of the West," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1985): 181–95; J. Baechler, "Aux origines de la modernité: castes et féodalités: Europe, Inde, Japon," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 27 (1986): 31–57; idem, *The Origins of Capitalism* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1975); M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power,* vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1986); J. Hall, *Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); idem, "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 26 (1985): 193–223; R. Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), chs. 3 and 9 especially.

all explicitly oriented themselves, in one way or another, to Weber.[5] The Weber invoked, however, is the one who emphasized status groups, bureaucratic structures, and patterns of domination – that is, that side of Weber most compatible with conflict theory.[6] Relatedly, it is not the Weber of the *Protestant Ethic* with its well-known (if never exclusive) emphasis on the importance of religious orientations, but rather the one who underscored the role of a specific constellation of economic and institutional conditions (such as markets, bureaucracies, legal systems, and state administrations) in favoring the emergence and expansion of capitalism.[7]

Most relevant to my present purpose is the tendency common to this cluster of works, not so much to overlook religion – which, in fact, is discussed extensively by all and whose role is well emphasized – but rather to systematically bracket out its ideological contents. In this perspective, religious institutions are either addressed as yet another form of economic organization or interest group, or assessed in terms of their contribution to the expansion of economic activity and state structures – be it through some form of social control or the more "Durkheimian" functions of normative integration and the enhancement of social solidarity.[8] (The selective way in which only certain aspects of Durkheim are made use of is here itself significant.)[9] Even

[5] See T. Skocpol (ed.), *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); D. Smith, *The Rise of Historical Sociology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); R. Collins, "Maturation of the State-Centered Theory of Revolution and Ideology," *Sociological Theory* 11(1993): 117–28.

[6] There are of course differences between these various authors; the overlap and convergence, however, seem to me the more striking and significant.

[7] See especially Max Weber, *General Economic History,* translated by F. H. Knight (New York, Collier-Macmillan, 1961 [1922]), pp. 207 ff. The conditions listed are technological advance, rational bookkeeping, a rationalized and predictable law system, rationalized modern state structures, a pool of free manpower, and the development of unified, unrestricted markets. The last chapters of the same volume, however, also reassert the importance of Protestantism in a way that does not deviate from his earlier thesis on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Although this is not a topic I can expand upon here, these scholars do not entirely ignore the possible part of Protestantism in early Western modernity, but again, relate to it in ways that underplay Protestantism's doctrinal contents and soteriological orientations.

[8] The word "functions" is used here devoid of its systemic, functionalistic charge. These scholars also share indeed a common opposition to Parsonian functionalism. Paradoxically, however, they do represent a form of functional, if not functionalist, approach to religion.

[9] Durkheim, after all, has also initiated a rich tradition of cultural analysis among symbolic anthropologists in particular. There is a vast development between Durkheim's relative insensitivity to religious contents in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1961), where the emphasis is indeed on the normative and solidary implications or "functions" of religion in general, and his later work on collective systems of classification (in collaboration with Marcel Mauss), predicated on a much more systematic attention to collective representations and the symbolic contents of cultural structures.

when duly noting the importance of monasteries, the analysis is restricted to viewing them as economic, protocapitalistic enterprises, or as crucial links in the economic and bureaucratic statelike network of the medieval Church, furthering the latter's intensive exploitation and extensive canvassing of material and human resources.[10]

Perhaps one way to break out of the endless circle of controversies concerning the social bases and implications of religious–ideological orientations – or more broadly, the perennial culture versus social-structure debate – is simply to acknowledge that the answer to this ever-vexing issue might not always be the same everywhere, at all times, and in all aspects or spheres of social life.[11] Religious–ideological orientations, in short, may be more influential in some contexts or situations than in others, and may even vary in the specific way in which they exert their influence in different circumstances and environments.

In the specific case of virtuosity and the virtuoso "macrocomplex," I shall argue that a failure to give appropriate weight to religious–ideological orientations would deprive the phenomenon of a most essential and necessary dimension. Recognizing the importance of religious orientations does not mean, of course, excluding the impact of other variables. In true Weberian spirit, religious orientations will be considered here as only one – albeit essential – variable, interacting and combining with a range of institutional and structural factors in the process of religious virtuosity's historical development and institutionalization.[12]

Both Buddhism and Christianity belong to that category of great-salvation religions, designated by Karl Jaspers as the "Axial Age" reli-

[10] See especially Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory,* pp. 52 ff.; Mann, *Sources of Social Power,* p. 37; F. Hall, *Powers and Liberties.*

[11] This brings me rather close, I believe, to the (eclectic) position held by Ernst Gellner. See E. Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 15. Gellner is also interestingly eclectic in combining a concern with the impact of religious breakthroughs and ideological–cognitive megatrends or mutations in the history of civilization (elaborating, for example, on Karl Jaspers's notion of the Axial Age, also adopted by Bellah and Eisenstadt), with a heavy emphasis on the role of religious specialists in the control of material and ideal resources (such as literacy and symbols of legitimacy) and the enforcement of social control. Also arguing that the relation between culture and social structure may vary across time and situations, see A. Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 5 (1986): 273–86. Within this more flexible and differentiated approach, however, one should recognize the existence of periods and situations where cultural orientations or value ends *do* have a direct and straightforward influence upon action.

[12] The commitment to a form of multicausality acknowledging the impact of religious beliefs and values as part of a full spectrum of patterned action orientations has been most recently and systematically explored as a characteristic of Weber's approach distinguishing it from other schools of comparative-historical sociology, in S. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, Eng.: Polity, 1994).

gions, that propound the idea of a radical breach between a transcendent ultimate reality and the world of given, mundane reality.[13] As underscored by Ernst Gellner in particular, an important feature of these great scripturalist religions is that they offer a universal and individual, theoretically "context-free" conception of salvation, in sharp contrast with "communal religions," that is, community-oriented and nonscriptural religions primarily concerned with underwriting and fortifying communal organization and the rhythm of communal life.[14] Religions of salvation, however, are not only and purely salvational, and may be expected to display a specific combination of communal and salvational orientations.[15] This underscores the need (as rightly felt indeed by some of the recent macrocomparative approaches already mentioned), to complement Weber's well-known attention to the salvational contents and meaning of religious orientations with a more "Durkheimian" or even "Parsonian" concern with the role of religion (and ritual practices)[16] in the consolidation of communal integration and solidarity.[17]

Conversely, however, the specific nature and context of a religion's "communal" orientations (such as its capacity for normative integration and large-scale solidarity) should also be understood as largely dependent upon its specific doctrinal and salvational contents. Analyzing the virtuoso "complex," I submit, will precisely require that we pay attention to religious virtuosity both as a form of religious salvational orientation and as the nexus of a complex type of "communal" integrative processes. The

[13] See R. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), 358–74; S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Axial Age: The Emergence of Transcendental Visions and the Rise of Clerics," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 23 (1982): 294–314; Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book,* p.81; B. J. Schwartz, "The Age of Transcendence," *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (1975), 1–7.

[14] Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book,* p. 91.

[15] Ibid., p. 92. Gellner, however, bases the persistence of communal orientations on the fact that those processes by which he also explained the success of a message of individual and universal salvation – namely social trends such as accelerated urbanization, which uprooted individuals and dismantled communal frameworks – were never total and pervasive. My emphasis, rather, is on "communal" dimensions related to the emergence of large-scale and differentiated religious and political collectivities, and to the fact that these religions have also become part of collective belief systems and the ideological core of entire civilizations.

[16] On Weber's general insensitivity to ritual (in contrast, of course, to Durkheim), associated by him with either the "passivity" of contemplative mysticism, the sacramental traditionalism of Catholicism, or simply primitive "magic," see R. Robertson, "On the Analysis of Mysticism: Pre-Weberian and Post-Weberian Perspectives," *Sociological Analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975): 248.

[17] Weber, of course, was also well aware of the conservative potential of religious ideology, but addressed it rather in terms of legitimization of economic and political inequality than in terms of collective integration and solidarity. As for Durkheim, he was not unaware, of course, of the need to study religious symbolic contents as such, although this has not been the distinctive strength and emphasis of his approach taken as a whole.

precise nature of these communal processes, moreover, cannot be understood independently of the salvational orientations involved in and affecting their institutionalization and historical deployment.

To that extent, the present study pursues the trend represented by an older generation of macrosociologists such as Robert Bellah, Peter Berger, S. N. Eisenstadt, Roland Robertson, and Edward Shils, all of whom stressed religious and ideological orientations as *both* structures of meaning and an all-important, constitutive dimension of the social order.[18] In rather eclectic fashion, however, I shall also borrow theoretical insights and concepts from a variety of additional directions, ranging from the Maussian tradition of gift exchange, to Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, and Michaël Mann's macrohistory of sources of power. As such, I also see my work as coinciding with the emergence of an eclectic and alternative current of historical and theoretical sociologists interested in the autonomous contents, forms, and impact of culture in various senses of that term, while also searching for new and interdisciplinary modes of cultural analysis.[19]

Focusing on Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism has a number of substantive and methodological advantages. In both civilizations, religious virtuosity has given rise to extensive and historically enduring monastic networks. There is indeed a vast difference between virtuosity as a purely individual, occasional, and localized phenomenon, and those few historical instances in which virtuosity became institutionally sustained and reinforced to the point of engendering a specialized "virtuoso institution." Furthermore, as will be explained in Chapter 2, monasticism is a rather complex and precarious institution, predicated on some form of withdrawal from and reversal of ordinary patterns of

[18] This group of scholars are all rather systematically shunned (because perceived as overly "Parsonian" and "idealist") in many of the more "materialist" and institutionalist or conflict-theory works in historical macrosociology.

[19] See J. C. Alexander (ed.), *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); C. Calhoun, "Beyond the Problem of Meaning: Robert Wuthnow's Historical Sociology of Culture," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 3 (1992): 419–44; J. A. Goldstone, "Ideology, Cultural Frameworks, and the Process of Revolution," *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): 405–54; L. Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); S. Kalberg, "The Origin and Expansion of Kulturpessimismus: The Relationship between Public and Private Spheres in Early Twentieth-Century Germany," *Sociological Theory* 5, no. 2 (1987): 150–64; idem, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality: Cornerstones for the Analysis of Rationalization Processes in History," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (1980): 1145–80; A. Kane, "Cultural Analysis in Historical Sociology: The Analytic and Concrete Forms of the Autonomy of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 53 (1990): 53–70; L. Roniger, *Hierarchy and Trust in Modern Mexico and Brazil* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Swidler, "Culture in Action"; D. Zaret, "Religion, Science and Printing in the Public Spheres in Seventeenth-Century England," in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 212–36.

social life. The powerful emergence and historical resilience of this peculiar type of virtuoso institution in these two settings, therefore, formed a major consideration in their selection for comparative study.

The emphasis, however, will be not so much on the monastic institution per se but rather, as already suggested, on the relationship between monasticism and society, and on the location of this relationship within the social structure at large. An important feature was the development of a network of material and symbolic exchange between the virtuoso and other social sectors, epitomized in a gift relationship between monks and laymen that resulted in a massive pouring of wealth into the monastic sector. In both civilizations, monasticism was thus able to establish itself in a position of cultural centrality and relative ascendancy over a nonmonastic audience willing to grant it a status of intrinsic spiritual superiority, as well as to provide it with uncoerced material support. At the same time, though – and in striking contrast to Tibetan monasticism in particular – monks in these two traditions also maintained a distance (both theoretically and practically) from the exercise of political power as commonly understood. Indeed, an essential feature of the gift relationship is that, however well established and routinized it became, it also remained fundamentally voluntary on both sides and supported, at most, by informal sanctions only.[20] In both settings, therefore, we see the case of a virtuoso elite ideologically self-defined as marginal and even opposed to extant forms of social life, and yet sustaining a position of cultural prestige and corporate wealth all the more noteworthy because devoid of the ordinary paraphernalia of political control and power. The result is a kind of "decentered centrality" not found in this precise configuration in any other civilizational setting.[21] Ideologically, the monastic sector exemplified the single-minded dedication to otherworldly ideals that were of central significance for society at large, and yet by definition could apply only to a minority living on the margins of social life. Institutionally, ascetic virtuosi were always defined as withdrawn from the center of secular rule and control, even though they were to become vital, at times, to the center's spiritual concerns, symbolic legitimacy, and even political expansion.

Emphasizing the similarity of the Theravada and Catholic configura-

[20] In both cases, admittedly, there is evidence for the occasional use of, if not actual coercion, at least "coercive persuasion," that is, monks inducing laymen to provide them with specific services or "donations" by threatening to prevent lay access to some crucial economic good – such as irrigation water in the Theravada context, or monastic mills in the Christian one. Such instances do appear, though, as occasional deviations from the dominant pattern of uncoerced donations.

[21] Although monasticism itself is present in Mahayana Buddhism, Tantric Buddhism, Jainism, and Eastern Christianity, it did not become the nexus of a full-fledged virtuoso–society complex in the sense that will be elaborated here (see Chapter 9 especially).

tions in such broad terms obviously poses the risk of oversimplifying what was in fact a rather complex and tension-ridden situation. In each case, the cultural status of the virtuoso sector, however prestigious and central, was rife with ambiguities. Furthermore, there were important fluctuations in the relationship between monasticism and the laity in general, and political centers in particular. Finally, although there were important similarities in the overall power and significance of monasticism in these two settings, there were basic differences as well. Christian monasticism took shape as part of a wider Church, and in subordination to a secular clergy in relation to which it was a controversial and competing historical development. In contrast, the Buddhist monastic order, the Sangha – somtimes said to have acquired "churchlike" characteristics over time – never had to come to terms with a wider ecclesiastical institution. Moreover, although monasticism achieved a pivotal social position in both cases, it also developed very different organizational characteristics and patterns of interaction with society at large. It is precisely these differences that this book describes and analyzes, albeit against the backdrop of an essential similarity that helps throw the differences into relief. Both similarities and differences will be stressed as equally essential to an adequate understanding of the virtuoso phenomenon in its interaction with different sociohistorical contexts.

The Theravada Buddhism–medieval Catholicism axis of comparison has a special and hitherto untapped interest for comparative sociology. Weber himself left us only scattered and unsystematic remarks on medieval Catholicism, to which he meant to devote a full-fledged study on a par with his detailed interpretations of other great traditions.[22] To the extent that Weber did discuss medieval Catholicism, he was rather interested in comparing it with India – mostly, it seems, because of what he saw as a somewhat similar combination of religious otherworldliness with a high degree of stratification and an organic conception of the social order[23] – than with Buddhism, which he tended to treat as merely a heterodox offshoot of Brahmanism. Moreover, whenever he did compare Buddhism to Western religions, he referred to Protestantism rather than to medieval Catholicism.

The Buddhism–Catholicism comparison has also been overlooked in a more recent body of comparative work, that of Louis Dumont, which focuses on the contrast between Indian "hierarchy" and Western "equality," and, more recently, on the "otherworldly" origins of Western indi-

[22] See the important collection of essays reexamining Weber's (incomplete) interpretation of Western Christendom by W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Sicht des okzidentalen Christentums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkampf, 1988).

[23] See W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus: Interpretation und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkampf, 1984), pp. 45 ff.

vidualism and the analogy with the Indian renunciate as an individual out of the world.[24] Whereas Dumont's work loomed large in the genesis of this study, it often tends to conflate Indian and Buddhist renunciation and does not deal with corporate (as distinct from individual) renunciation.[25] Consequently, although his work is undoubtedly a monumental landmark in the comparative study of asceticism and renunciation, it does not really address monasticism proper – the core of our comparison.

A similar preference for a comparison of medieval Europe with India rather than with Southeast Asian Buddhism is to be found in S. N. Eisenstadt's corpus of work on the comparative study of civilizations. On the background of apparent sociostructural similarities (such as a high degree of political pluralism and decentralization), Eisenstadt's dominant concern is to bring into relief some essential differences between medieval Europe and India with regard to their evaluation and construction of the political sphere.[26] To the extent that Eisenstadt did dwell on Buddhism, moreover, he is mostly engaged in assessing, in this specific case as in many others, the overall potential for transformation resulting from a specific configuration of religious orientations and sociopolitical structures. Although religious orientations and religious elites are given systematic weight in this perspective (in this respect probably the most systematic elaboration of the Weberian tradition in historical sociology), monasticism is addressed only with regard to its contributions to religious protest and political change, and is not otherwise given any sustained or distinctive attention.

An important implication of this focus on monasticism and the relationship between monasticism and society is the challenge it poses to the

[24] L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); idem, *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); idem, "A Modified View of our Origins: The Christian Origins of Modern Individualism," *Religion* 12 (1982): 1–27.

[25] Corporate renunciation was not to flourish, indeed, within the confines of the Brahmanic tradition. It is significant that otherworldliness was able to give rise to various forms of renunciation, and even to maintain elements of renunciation in the conception of the Brahmin priest – as emphasized in J. C. Heesterman, "Brahmin, Ritual and Renouncer," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 8 (1964):1–31 – but did not receive monastic institutionalization.

[26] See especially S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework," in *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization: A Comparative View* (New York: Basic, 1968), pp. 3–45; idem, *European Civilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987); idem, "The Expansion of Religions: Some Comparative Observations on Different Modes," *Comparative Social Research*, 13 (1991): 45–70; idem, "Die Paradoxie von Zivilisationen mit ausserwertlichen Orientierungen: Uberlungen zu Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus," in Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie*, pp. 333–62.

common contrast of Buddhist otherworldly "weakness" with Western "power" and "dynamism" in matters of institution building and worldly involvement. This contrast is heavily emphasized in Weber's own work, where it seems to have been rooted, ultimately, in his overriding concern with the unique features of Western rationality. For Weber, only religious orientations inducive of what he designated as active, innerworldly asceticism could have encouraged a sustained, rationalized involvement in the world of the type which was to become so crucial, in his eyes, to the development of Western modernity. As is more fully developed in Chapter 1, the importance he gave to Protestantism – and more specifically, Puritan Calvinism – in this respect was accompanied by a relative neglect and somewhat ambiguous assessment of medieval monasticism. Although underscoring the latter's conservative implications, he also emphasized it as the ideological matrix from which Protestantism fatefully emerged, and was bent on giving it a part in his overall interpretation of the unique features of Western civilization.

Weber's overall vision of history, in any case, is now easily criticized for its "Western" and even more specifically "Calvinist" bias. As has now been argued by many, Buddhism's potential for economic rationalization and worldly involvement may have been much greater than Weber granted.[27] I shall not deal here, however, with the issue of the differential potential of Christianity and Buddhism for economic dynamism and "modernity," which is now becoming a focus of renewed interest as the leading edge of economic expansion is understood by many to be moving away from the West and into (or even to some minds, back into)[28] the East. Neither do I wish to address the meaningful issue – so salient to Dumont's work and recently insightfully reassessed by Steven Collins – of the legacy of "outworldly" asceticism to the development of individualism and/or Western egalitarianism and other social utopias, all undoubtedly central to our understanding of Western moder-

[27] For example, H. S. Alatas, "The Protestant Ethic and Southeast Asia," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 15 (1963): 21–34; R. N. Bellah (ed.), *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Eisenstadt, "Protestant Ethic"; idem, "Some Reflections on the Significance of Max Weber's Sociology of Religion for the Analysis of Non-European Modernity," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 32 (1971): 29–52; S. J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against Historical Background* (Cambridge University Press, 1973); idem, "Buddhism and This-Worldly Activity," *Modern Asian Studies* 7 (1973): 1–20. Tambiah has especially brought into relief Buddhism's worldly potential in the political sphere.

[28] See the analysis of the rise and temporary nature of Western economic hegemony as building upon a preceding system of world economy in which the "Oriental" powers eventually lost their commercial leadership, in Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

nity.[29] Finally, I shall not deal here with the more specific issue of Christian monasticism's contribution to Western economic rationalization and expansion – which I have actually broached elsewhere.[30] My present interest, rather, is with the need to turn to comparative analysis with other concerns in mind than the advent of capitalism and rationality or "modernity" in general. However crucial these themes undeniably are, they have tended to divert attention from others that are no less important from an empirical and theoretical point of view.

Shifting away, thus, from the issues that have hitherto dominated the comparative sociological discourse on religious asceticism, I plan to focus here on the differing capacity of virtuoso elites to achieve institutional strength and collective relevance.[31] Although this issue is pertinent to all religious elites, it becomes even more intriguing in the case of virtuoso elites dedicated to otherworldly ideals nominally opposed to worldly involvement and thus irrelevant to the immediate concerns of the average majority.

A major contention of this book is that one needs to distinguish among various criteria of institutional vitality and collective relevance. With regard to such evident criteria of institutionalization as formal organization, institutional autonomy, and political power, Theravada Buddhist monasticism will be shown to have much less institutional strength than its Christian equivalent. In terms of the position of monasticism within the overall social structure, however, Buddhist monasticism will emerge as more solidly institutionalized, maintaining (with only minor variations) an enduring social position and pattern of relationship with wider society. Christian monasticism, in contrast, underwent critical shifts in social position, was the focus of constant uncertainties and controversies, and emerged seriously undermined toward the end of the period under study.

The intriguing problem, therefore, is how to conceptualize the tenor, or basis, of monasticism's institutional strength in the Theravada case. A proper understanding of the Buddhist Sangha, it will appear, must draw not so much on its own organizational and institutional features as on the specific pattern of virtuoso–layman relations that came to form a

[29] S. Collins, "Monasticism, Utopias and Comparative Social Theory," *Religion* 18 (1988): 101–35.

[30] See Silber, "Monasticism and the Protestant Ethic: Asceticism, Ideology and Wealth in the Medieval West," *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1993): 103–23.

[31] I do not mean, however, that such an angle of analysis is of no relevance to more "modern" concerns. In fact, it would be intriguing to pursue the analogy with another powerful component of "modernity" left marginal in the studies already mentioned, namely, the advent of intellectual, artistic, and scientific elites, or even of the professions in general, with the element of ascetic discipline and distancing from the masses that this has entailed.

diffuse but enduring and essential axis of societal organization in Theravada countries. This virtuoso–layman relation, moreover, is not a unique and exclusively Theravada phenomenon. It is a major purpose of this book to show that it had a striking, albeit partial and less enduring, equivalent in at least one more civilizational context, that of medieval Catholicism.

This analysis has a number of theoretical implications. First, it implies that institution building can be seen not only in terms of organizational–corporate structures, but also in terms of sets of relationships or relational structures. These two views, to my mind, are to be understood as complementary rather than mutually exclusive perceptions of what society is about. The emphasis on relational structures is not new. Already essential to Simmel's approach, it has reappeared, in widely differing forms, in a variety of current sociological trends, such as network theory or certain brands of structuralism. Relational structures have an even longer lineage of anthropological proponents, perhaps due to anthropology's traditional concern with kinship and systems of exchange.

Rather than just reasserting the importance of relational structures from a purely ontological and theoretical perspective, I propose to consider the two basic modes of institutionalization – organizational–structural versus relational – as empirical and culturally influenced variables. From such a perspective, social groups or even societies may be found to display different aptitudes for and reliance upon two fundamental and possibly complementary strategies of institutionalization, and differentially apply them to various spheres of life. It becomes then the task of comparative sociology to "diagnose" such variations within and between societies, as well as to enquire into their social and cultural sources – a challenge addressed here from the limited perspective of our own specific topic, the institutionalization of religious virtuosity.

Focusing on the interaction between virtuosi and laymen, moreover, has some interesting implications for the perennial dichotomy between micro- and macrosociological traditions of analysis, and the possibility of bridging the gap between them – a prominent and vexing issue in contemporary sociological theory.[32] In line with some recent theoretical treatments of the problem, I regard the micro/macro distinction as refer-

[32] See, for example, G. Ritzer, "Micro–Macro Linkage in Sociological Theory: Applying a Metatheoretical Tool," in G. Ritzer (ed.), *Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Syntheses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); R. Wiley, "The Micro–Macro Problem in Social Theory," *Sociological Theory* 6 (1988): 254–61; J. C. Alexander et al. (eds.), *The Micro–Macro Link*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987); S. N. Eisenstadt and H. J. Helle, "General Introduction to Perspectives on Sociological Theory," in S. N. Eisenstadt and H. J. Helle (eds.), *Macrosociological Theory: Perspectives on Sociological Theory*, vol. 1 (London: Sage, 1985).

ring to different analytical perspectives or emphases rather than "empirically" different realities: One same social process can be analyzed from either a micro or macro perspective, depending on the analyst's priorities.[33] My own choice here is to stress the macrosociological significance of a process of interaction and exchange – concretely expressed, as already explained, in the development of a gift relationship – that belongs essentially to what is traditionally defined as the microsociological plane of local and even face-to-face relations.[34] In this analysis, the overall position of religious elites invested with macrosocietal significance as the prime carriers of central religious ideal emerges as ultimately dependent upon a microsociological, voluntary, and rather precarious process of interaction and exchange between these elites and their lay audience. Judging from the broader and historically more resilient deployment of the virtuoso–layman interaction at both the local and central level in traditional Theravada Buddhist countries, Buddhist virtuosi appear to have been much more "successful" at this process than their Christian counterparts. A major objective of this book is precisely to delineate the ideological and institutional configurations that facilitated this major difference in the sociological implications of virtuoso religion in Western Europe and Southeast Asia.

To state it a bit provocatively: Alongside the traditional Weberian account, which inserts virtuoso asceticism in the established narrative of the "rise of the West," emerges a possible alternative account, one that inscribes virtuoso asceticism as a dominant aspect of a narrative focusing on the "tenacity," or even "tenacious expansion" of the East. Shifting attention to the more solid and successful features of a specific type of socioreligious structure in the "East," however, does not necessarily contradict the more conventional Weberian search for the unique features of Western civilization. My interpretation of the medieval West will in fact confirm in many ways, and complement rather than contradict, those features that a traditional Weberian interpretation emphasizes as typically Western. More essentially, I certainly do not mean to sketch here any alternative "grand map of history." Nor do I claim to present a sector of Asian civilization on its own terms. Much more modestly and strictly within the scope of Western sociological discourse,

[33] See especially R. Münch and N. J. Smelser, "Relating the Micro and Macro," in Alexander et al. (eds.), *Micro–Macro Link*, pp. 356–87.

[34] I shall not refer here to the extensive sociological literature relevant to the subject, nor shall I elaborate on the precise relation of the type of exchange characteristic of the virtuoso–layman relation and existing typologies of exchange, none of which seems to me to exactly apply. Overall, my preference will be to situate my argument in this regard within the tradition of gift analysis. I have most benefited, however, from R. Paine, "Two Modes of Exchange and Mediation," in B. Kapferer (ed.), *Transaction and Meaning* (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1976), pp. 63–86.

it seems to me that concern with the unique dynamics of the West should be matched with an equal concern for the unique dynamics of non-Western civilizations. Moreover, it is precisely this kind of more balanced comparative perspective that might bring into light, because viewed from hitherto unexpected angles, aspects of our own civilization of which we otherwise might not have been aware.

It should be stressed that the focus on "traditional Buddhism" and medieval Catholicism shifts the comparison away from the early, formative phases of each religion (although occasional reference will be made to various characteristics of these initial stages) to the interaction between monasticism and society in its more institutionalized, established stages, when the partial convergence in institutional development that lies at the core of the comparative rationale in this work emerged.[35] This choice, moreover, has the notable advantage of keeping early modern or modern developments, *in either setting,* beyond the pale of our comparison. A great deal of West-versus-East comparative analysis has suffered, precisely, from the tendency to compare "Asian" developments in bulk (conflating both traditional and "modern" periods) with either early or modern Western ones – skipping thus a more differentiated comparison with the premodern West. Dominant comparative conceptions might emerge significantly modified when one compares the traditional medieval West with its Eastern equivalent – that is, before the onset of colonial, Christian, and "modern" influences.

"Traditional Theravada Buddhism," to use Heinz Bechert's definition, refers to the period from the final codification of the canonical scriptures to the onset of the colonial "modern era," and is broadly characterized by the development of formalized state–Sangha relations and the establishment of Buddhism as the dominant "national" religion, first in Sri Lanka and then in a number of Southeast Asian kingdoms.[36] The exact period in which Buddhism may be said to have been dominant differs, however, for each of the three major Theravada Buddhist countries we shall focus upon. It is the longest in the case of Sri Lanka, where it stretches from the arrival of Buddhism from India during the reign and

[35] This may be a particular instance of the observation that "religions, however different they may be in their origins, fundamental insights and doctrinal structures, do tend to become similar." See R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (London: Athlone, 1976), p. 84. The issue of historical connection and mutual influence between Buddhist and Christian monasticism will not be addressed here. Monasticism may have penetrated the West through the mediation of Buddhist monasticism (although other sources of influence have been considered). There can be no doubt, however, that it would not have grown such solid roots into Western soil if not for endogenous cultural forces favoring its development.

[36] H. Bechert, "Sangha, State, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies," *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 85.

under the sponsorship of Ashoka (mid-third century BCE), to the coming of the Portuguese in 1505 (although some reference will be made to the later Kandyan independent period). In the case of Burma, it roughly spans the era from the Pagan period (ninth to thirteenth centuries)[37] to the end of the nineteenth century, whereas for Thailand, the traditional era may be dated from the mid-thirteenth-century Sukhodaya kingdom to Mongkut's reign (1851–68).[38]

Precolonial, "traditional" Theravada Buddhism has been characterized by many students of the field as exhibiting a rather impressive continuity in cultural and institutional structures,[39] all the more remarkable given the rapid succession of kingdoms, sweeping migratory trends, endemic warfare, and recurrent waves of invasion.[40] This continuity is especially emphasized in contrast with the profound discontinuities introduced by colonial rule and the penetration of Western influences. The issue of structural continuity versus change, however, has by now become a thorny source of controversy.[41] A closely related issue is the extent to which one may choose to emphasize national and regional variations, or rather play up the important similarities between the ma-

[37] There is some disagreement on whether the Pagan period can already be taken to represent the traditional Theravada pattern. M. Aung-Thwin sees basic institutional continuities from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries; see "The Role of *Sasana* Reform in Burmese History: Economic Dimensions of a Religious Purification," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 674; whereas Charles Keyes would tend to date the onset of the traditional pattern from the end of the Pagan period. See "Structure and History in the Study of the Relationship between Theravada Buddhism and Political Order," *Numen* 25 (1978): 167.

[38] Mongkut's reign signals the onset of effective Western influence even if, unlike in Burma and Ceylon, no colonial conquest took place and absolute monarchy came to an end only in 1938.

[39] See for example G. Obeyesekere, "Religion and Polity in Theravada Buddhism: Continuity and Change in a Great Tradition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, no. 4 (1979): 626–39; Tambiah, *World Conqueror,* especially pp. 516 ff.; Keyes, "Structure and History."

[40] The apparent contradiction between social and political instability and a general sense of cultural continuity has been aptly summed up by Keyes: "Indeed, both socially and politically traditional Theravada Buddhist societies were in constant turmoil. . . . Yet, for all this social and political flux, both peasant and ruler in traditional Theravada Buddhist society lived in meaningful worlds. . . . Rulers and peasants all also knew that underlying the turmoil of existence was a permanent moral order, that which was grounded in Karma. The Buddhist religion thus flourished despite the constantly changing political scene." See *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 94.

[41] See, for instance, the polemic intensity of some of the articles discussing S. J. Tambiah's work, in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* n.s. 21, no. 1 (1987). See also (although the author is less preoccupied with the issue of continuity in premodern periods), E. Cohen, "Socio-cultural Change in Thailand: A Reconceptualization," in E. Cohen, M. Lissak, and U. Almagor, *Comparative Social Dynamics: Essays in Honor of S. N. Eisenstadt,* pp. 82–94 (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985).

jor Theravada Buddhist countries and even talk of a global Theravada pattern.

Much of these debates may be reduced to differences in foci of analysis and in theoretical underpinnings, and may well have to remain so, given the nature and paucity of historical data (especially compared to the wealth of material pertinent to the medieval West). It is now clear, however, that in the long span of the "traditional" period, Theravada polities and social structures underwent not merely short-term, marginal, or "cyclical" change, but also more profound and gradual transformations – such as a long-term trend toward increased political centralization, and the steady expansion of intra-Asian trade. It is also evident that the debate on continuity and change has addressed mostly central political and administrative processes – such as the nature of Buddhist kingship and polity – and that greater agreement might have obtained concerning processes at the local, village level.

Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that even those who call for a more differentiated and dynamic picture have also emphasized how distinctly conservative traditional Theravada Buddhism has been,[42] stressed a general sense of cultural continuity in the face of apparently constant social and political turmoil,[43] or tried to "identify those principles in Buddhism and those perennial socio-economic circumstances by which events are replicated in the Theravada realm."[44] Searching for discontinuities thus, in this field as any other, does not necessarily imply denying all continuity. No less crucially, a stress on continuity does not necessarily imply a static analysis. Since these (ever-vexing) issues are cardinal to my comparative argument, I might as well make my own choices fully explicit. For present purposes, I shall give priority to similarities and continuities throughout the period considered and in all parts of the Theravada "complex," if also pointing out significant regional and historical divergences when appropriate. I need to stress, however, that I emphasize continuity in only one dimension, and not with regard to other aspects of Theravada Buddhist history. With regard to the specific object of this inquiry at least – namely, the virtuoso–layman relation – it is the endurance and resilience of certain forms and patterns that begs to be explained, all the more so when contrasted with the fluidity of the picture in the medieval West.

This choice, once again, does not necessarily imply a static analysis. The task, rather, is to define the sociocultural forces and dynamics allow-

[42] See R. F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), introduction.

[43] See fn. 19, this chapter.

[44] M. Carrithers, "The Modern Ascetics of Lanka and the Pattern of Change in Buddhism," *Man* 14 (1979): 294.

ing for the production and reproduction of what might have seemed a very fragile and unlikely form of relationship between virtuosi and society. The persistence of that structure cannot be explained away or taken for granted as the mere result of inertia or routine survival; in fact it will be shown to owe a lot to some major developments in the ideological and institutional history of Theravada polities, as especially emphasized in chapters 3 and 4. Continuity then, in this case at least, is to be seen as the result of a complex combination of forces of reproduction and change, and actually becomes all the more intriguing in face of the more recent stress on processes of change in other aspects of Theravada history.

As for the medieval West, we shall focus on the era between the sixth and thirteenth centuries (sometimes called the "Benedictine centuries"), in what corresponds to modern France, Germany, Italy, and England – leaving out Spain and Ireland.[45] This era encompasses a baseline period lasting until roughly the eleventh century, during which we shall see a partial convergence with developments in the Theravada Buddhist context. This is followed by a period of critical changes within the virtuoso sector itself and in the relationship between virtuosi and society: the eremitic revival; the Gregorian period; the apostolic and mendicant movements. This period also witnessed far-reaching social and political changes – all in contrast to Theravada's relative "continuity" – and is now increasingly focused upon as a time of ferment and institution building (very far from the once-dominant conception of that period as a time of "darkness" and immobility). Within the pale of historical sociological literature, the tendency is now to emphasize the importance of this period in setting into motion – much before the Protestant Reformation – a number of dynamics of crucial importance for the understanding of Western modernity.[46] It is now a matter of increasing consensus that the twelfth century in particular represented a momentous turning point in the his-

[45] There is much debate concerning the adequate definition and the internal periodization of the "Middle Ages." I shall be following here, roughly, Southern's distinction between a "primitive age" between ca. 700–ca. 1050; an "age of growth," ca. 1050–ca. 1300; and a time of "inflationary spiral," ca. 1300–ca. 1520. See R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1970). The period addressed here coincides with Southern's first two stages. Le Goff, in contrast, propounds a very long Middle Ages, stretching from the third to the mid-nineteenth century. Forced to look for subphases, however, he sees a prolongation of Late Antiquity until the seventh century, a High Middle Ages until the tenth, followed by a period of growth until the fourteenth century; the period between the mid-twelfth and mid-thirteenth centuries, in his opinion, saw the most decisive mutations. See J. Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp. viii–xviii.

[46] See for example Chirot, "Rise of the West"; Mann, *Sources of Social Power;* Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory.* I have also approached the issue through the specific angle of monastic economy in "Monasticism and the Protestant Ethic: Asceticism, Ideology and Wealth in the Medival West," *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (1993): 103–23.

tory of Western Europe, and it is not incidental that it will also be emphasized here as an important watershed in the dynamics of the relationship between virtuosi and society.

Admittedly, this emphasis on a general contrast between a relative "continuity" in the virtuoso–layman relation in the Buddhist case and sharp changes in the Christian one, involves some serious methodological problems. The major one, already referred to and often bemoaned by Theravada scholars, is the relative paucity of historical data on social and religious developments in the Theravada Buddhist setting – stemming, at least in part, from the relative lack of interest in historical recordkeeping characteristic of Buddhist, and even more generally, Indian civilization.[47] This problem is compounded by the fact – common to Southeast Asia and medieval Christendom – that sources on monastic history are themselves monastic, since monks were the only ones with the literacy and other scholarly skills necessary for the writing of records and chronicles.

Another severe methodological stricture relates to the nature of virtuoso asceticism itself, and the tendency to radical forms of withdrawal from society with which it seems to have been often associated. Any historical and sociological interpretation of virtuoso asceticism must allow for the fact that we may well know nothing about those virtuoso ascetics who were most successful in maintaining isolation and anonymity, either as individuals or in groups. Furthermore, both clergy and more established monks might have systematically ignored or even suppressed evidence about forms of virtuosity with which they were not in agreement. We may only speculate whether more historical documentation on these issues would have affected, among other things, the understanding of either Theravada Buddhism's relative "continuity" or medieval Catholicism's "change."

The present inquiry belongs to the realm of comparative sociological interpretation, and makes no claim to cover new historical ground. Within these limits, however, I believe I have offered a new perspective on a number of old issues, and have posed a new set of questions to the many specialists in whose fields I have been treading – at the undeniable cost of sacrificing much in historical complexity. One important issue that I was not able to tackle here is that of gender. Although women constituted a significant and increasing element of the virtuoso sector in medieval

[47] This is very far, at any rate, from the Judeo-Christian concern with historical processes, and even more, from the well-known passion of the Chinese for record keeping – allowing for superbly documented studies of Buddhist monasticism in China, such as that of J. Gernet, *Les aspects économiques du bouddhisme dans la société chinoise du Ve au Xe siècles* (Saigon: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1956). The Chinese impact has also facilitated historical documentation on branches of Buddhist monasticism that have flourished in areas tributary to or on the periphery of China.

Christianity (especially after the period of our inquiry) in the Theravada tradition their part quickly dwindled after a brief presence in the early phases. Exploring this and other gender-related differences would no doubt enrich our overall understanding of the interaction between religious virtuosity and social order, a task already much encouraged by the recent increase in historical studies of women's religiosity in general, and of female monasticism in particular in early and medieval Christianity.[48]

Finally, a comparative study limited to only two cases, however broadly defined and carefully selected, can only be tentative in its conclusions. Ideally, it would be desirable to locate this study of monastic virtuoso religion within a broader comparative framework, including Eastern Christian monasticism, early Irish monasticism, Tibetan Lamaism, and Buddhist monasticism in China. India would also constitute an important case, since otherworldliness there gave rise to radical forms of renunciation (although only to a late and relatively weak development of monasticism within the frame of classical Hinduism). A comprehensive comparative analysis should also consider those settings in which only quasi-monastic forms of virtuoso organization evolved (such as the early Muslim monasticism and Sufi orders), or where no monasticism evolved at all (rabbinic Judaism), despite the presence of virtuoso orientations encouraging the voluntary search for some form of above-average religious perfection. Although falling short of such a truly comprehensive project, I do hope to have at least indicated the interest that further work in these various areas holds in terms of its potential significance for the comparative sociological study of civilizations.[49]

The first section of this book, essentially theoretical in character, proposes to define the major ideological and institutional forces shaping the relationship between virtuoso elites and society, and thus to establish the basic frame and parameters of a multidimensional comparative analysis. Chapter 1 is a review and critique of Weber's foundations in this domain, emphasizing not only his vital contributions (in this field as in so many others) but also some of his major biases and limitations. Chapter 2 analyzes monasticism as a specific type of social formation, with distinctive ideological and organizational dynamics that were not attended to in

[48] See C. W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), ch. 5; S. Helkin, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); R. Ruether and E. C. McLaughlin (eds.), *Women of Spirit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979).

[49] For a welcome and recent contribution to the cross-cultural and comparative understanding of monasticism (from a comparative religious rather than comparative sociological perspective), see the recent volume of essays, *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions: A Comparative Study,* edited by Austin B. Creel and V. Narayanan (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1990), which I was able to consult only after completion of this manuscript.

the Weberian framework. It starts with a critical survey of the still rather scant sociological literature on the subject and suggests application of a modified form of Victor Turner's well-known notion of antistructure to the understanding of monasticism as a type of "alternative structure." This is followed by a discussion of a number of functionalist or "functionalistlike" interpretations that have the merit of drawing attention to aspects of the relation between monasticism and society understated in the Weberian approach, yet that themselves remain partial and unsatisfactory. This chapter then outlines the comparative rationale of the present research, incorporating elements of both the Weberian and functionalist approaches, while also offering additional dimensions of inquiry.

Sections II and III of the book are detailed analyses of the Theravada and medieval Catholic historical cases respectively in terms of the parameters of comparison elaborated in the first section. I need to stress, with regard to specialist readers who may want to relate to only one or both of these chapters, that they make no claim to fully cover all aspects of the interaction between monks and society in each setting, but rather present and select materials informed by the specific comparative questions and priorities deployed in this Introduction and in Part I.

The fourth and last section is a theoretical and comparative discussion of religious virtuosity as a distinctive sociological phenomenon and cultural variable. The first chapter in this final section aims at clarifying the defining features of virtuosity in relation to charisma – one of Weber's better-known legacies to the social sciences – and at establishing the ideal-typical features of what I call the "virtuoso–society complex." The following chapter maps out, on the basis of the case studies, the major ideological and institutional forces shaping the differential expression of this complex in these and other civilizational settings.

Finally, the conclusion points out some implications of this analysis of religious virtuosity and the virtuoso complex with regard to the place of religious ideology and structures in the context of premodern macrosocietal formations. As already suggested, religious ideological orientations are given systematic and detailed attention here, both as a defining feature of virtuosity itself and as part of the constellation of variables shaping the differential development of the virtuoso macrocomplex in different civilizations. In contrast, a number of important works in comparative historical sociology have simply chosen to deemphasize religious orientations, and rather to focus on the economic and institutional facets of religious organizations. Singling out Mann's contribution in this regard, I wish to both draw upon and criticize his challenging analysis of "ideological power." In the case of virtuoso elites, I argue, "ideological power" is simply, to a large extent, the power of ideology. Seriously relating to religious ideology and ideals, however, does not imply defin-

ing them as a set of homogeneous, unequivocal directions or clear-cut answers to problems of meaning. One important lesson of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* is precisely that religious beliefs and orientations do offer soteriological answers, but that these answers themselves engender new sets of existential problems, and may very well end up having unintended and paradoxical effects. Admittedly, this specific tack of analysis was not truly pursued by Weber himself in his studies of non-Western civilizations, or even, for that matter, in the understanding of any aspect or period of Western civilization preceding the Reformation. To some extent, we now stand at a point where neither the classical nor the more contemporary macrosociological approaches to religion provide us with sufficient tools of cultural analysis. What is probably needed (and has already started to arise) is an increasingly interdisciplinary and eclectic approach to the interpretation of collective structures of meaning. Tackling the issue from the very specific angle offered in this book, at any rate, I hope to have addressed the social significance of religious virtuoso orientations in a way that not only builds upon the Weberian tradition but also contributes to the search for new modes of cultural analysis within the expanding boundaries of interpretive sociology.

Part I
Virtuosi and society: elements of a comparative macrosociological approach

1 The Weberian legacy

Weber's typological and comparative framework

In Weber's classic statement,[1] "virtuoso" or "heroic" religiosity is primarily defined in opposition to mass religiosity. Human beings vary in their religious capacities and in the special personal attributes – the "charisma"[2] – necessary to attain the highest religious ends. As a result, a status stratification emerges in which the most qualified come to constitute a kind of "spiritual aristocracy" devoted to the methodical pursuit of salvation. This methodical pursuit usually entails the subjugation of natural drives (as defined in each cultural setting) to some form of rigid discipline, and implies a criticism of the more complacent lifestyle of the masses. (Incidentally, Weber does not seem to have attached to the term virtuosity any of the negative connotations nowadays possibly associated with it – virtuosity in the sense of "merely" technical brilliance and superficial, "soulless" artistic performance.)[3]

The virtuosi's superior religious status is not, however, without ambiguities. Their single-minded and methodical pursuit of the highest religious ends appears to engender a whole range of tensions in their relation with society at large. A first and major source of tension is what Weber sees as a basic antagonism between virtuosi and the religious establishment.[4] In the case of Christianity, for example, there is an inevitable tension between the characteristic tendency of virtuosi to seek sanctification on their own, and the Church's institutional monopoly on mediating the bestowal of religious grace. Furthermore, the Church makes salvation universally accessible, through its sacraments, to people with varying degrees of ethical and religious qualification – a leveling that stands in marked contrast to the elitism of the virtuoso. Such tensions have resulted, historically, in many and varied compromises. We-

[1] M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), pp. 162–5.

[2] This is only one of his many different uses of the word.

[3] The notion of virtuosity appears to have undergone divergent semantic development in the various European languages. In English, the term was first associated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the pursuit of science and knowledge, and only later with artistic excellence. As reported in German dictionaries of Weber's time, the term mostly applied to the arts in general and to music in particular. Weber's extension of the term to the field of religion brought it closer, in fact, to the Italian usage, which allowed for a much broader semantic scope, first connoting some form of religious and moral excellence, and only second the idea of artistic expertise.

[4] Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 187.

ber especially emphasized the "concessions" that religious virtuosi have made, "adjusting their demands to the possibilities of everyday life religiosity, in order to maintain ideal and material mass patronage."[5]

The precise nature of these concessions determines the virtuosi's actual influence on everyday life. The critical distinction is that between two types of virtuoso religion: the first, "contemplative–orgiastic" in character, best exemplified, in Weber's view, by Buddhism and Jainism; the second, "activist–ascetic," of which Protestantism, and more specifically Calvinism, is taken as the prototype.

In contemplative virtuoso religion, action in the world is perceived as essentially inferior, and an abyss separates the virtuoso's lifestyle from that of the layman. The relation that evolved between them, as Weber sees it, is one of "magical anthropolatry": the layman either worships the virtuoso himself directly, as a saint, or "buys" the virtuoso's blessings or magical powers in order to promote his own mundane interests or religious salvation.[6] The contemplative virtuoso does not exhort the layman to approximate his own way of life. Even when acting as spiritual adviser, his influence lies not in the sphere of ethics, but rather – and in Weber's frame, merely – in that of ritual.[7]

In his discussion of the activist–ascetic model of religious virtuosity, in contrast, Weber does not focus at all on the virtuoso–layman interaction.[8] Instead, his attention is now turned to the virtuoso's orientation to everyday life and the workaday world, and more specifically, to the affinities between activist–ascetic religious virtuosity and economic rationalization, the well-known theme of his thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.*[9] There is in fact a striking imbalance in Weber's treatment of what he had defined as two basic, contrasting types of virtuosity. The bulk of his writing on the subject is concerned with inner-worldly asceticism and its far-reaching implications for Western rationalization and modernization. Contemplative or mystically oriented virtuosity, on the other hand, is consistently downplayed, treated much less extensively, and credited with little sociological significance.[10]

The crucial role that Weber attributed to inner-worldly, activist asceticism in the development of Western rationalization and modernity, at

[5] H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (ed. and trans.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 288.

[6] Ibid., p. 289.

[7] On Weber's generally pejorative and (sociologically) insufficient treatment of ritual, see this volume, Introduction, fn. 13.

[8] Gerth and Mills (ed. and trans.), *Max Weber,* pp. 290–1.

[9] M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1958).

[10] For a fuller analysis of Weber's relative neglect of mysticism, see W. R. Garret, "Maligned Mysticism: The Maledicted Career of Troeltsch's Third Type," *Sociological Analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975): 205–23; Robertson, "Analysis of Mysticism."

any rate, clearly establishes that virtuosi constituted much more than just an additional category in his typology of religious specialists. Far from being a marginal theme in his work, virtuosity emerges as a leading motif in his conception of the differential historical development of civilizations.[11] The Protestant ethic itself, in his understanding, represented a transformation and extension of medieval monastic virtuosity. It "carried asceticism out of monastic cells into everyday life"; no less crucially, it transferred the demands of inner-worldly asceticism to all members of the religious community, overthrowing the distinction between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi that underlay the virtuoso's position in the Catholic social order.[12]

In some sense, we see here the notion of virtuosity stretched to its limits, since Protestant virtuoso asceticism entails the repudiation of the very idea of a distinction between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi, of the implied contrast with mass religiosity intrinsic to the very notion of virtuosity itself as defined by Weber himself at the beginning of this chapter.[13] Weber's use of the term virtuosity here may simply reflect his overall assessment of Protestant active asceticism as not only a transformation of traditional forms of virtuosity but also as a form of religiosity entailing a most demanding level of religious strain and ascetic rigor – of a kind otherwise expected of religious elites only.

Be that as it may, the story then becomes, in Weber's narrative of the far-reaching implications of this crucial mutation in the history of Christian virtuosity, not one of repeated conflicts and "compromises" with the world, but rather one of unrelenting, rationalized channeling of one's

11 For the intertwining of the theme of religious virtuosity with other essential aspects of Weber's comparative sociology of religion, see W. Schluchter, "Weltflüchtiges Erlösungsstreben und organische Sozialethik: Uberlegungen zu Max Webers Analysen der indischen Kulturreligionen," in W. Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie über Hinduismus und Buddhismus: Interpretation und Kritik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkampf, 1984), pp. 11–71. On the centrality of the notions of rationality and rationalization, and their various meanings in Weber's work, see Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality"; A. Swidler, "The Concept of Rationality in the Work of Max Weber," *Sociological Enquiry* 43 (1973): 35–42; also directly relevant is W. Schluchter, "The Paradox of Rationalization: On the Relation of Ethics and World," in G. Roth and W. Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History: Ethics and Methods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 11–64.

12 "The conception of the calling thus brings out that central dogma of all Protestant denominations which the Catholic division of ethical precepts into *praecepta* and *consilia* discards. The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling." Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, p. 80; see also pp. 153–4.

13 Touching upon this issue, see D. Martin, *Pacifism: An Historical and Sociological Study* (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 163.

personal drives and religious anxieties in an uncompromising attempt to act as the active vessel of the will of God in the world.

In the Catholic framework, in contrast, Weber stresses again the importance of "concessions" and "compromises" in determining not only the virtuosi's relation to the world, but also the world's, and in particular the Church's, ambivalent relation to them. The compromise solution arrived at was to allow the virtuoso, with his higher ethical achievements, to ensure his own salvation and accumulate good works to the credit of the Chruch, which would in turn redistribute them to the nonvirtuosi. This ideological procedure fitted well into medieval Catholicism's "organic" conception of differences in class and position: "The virtuosi of religion, be they of an ascetic or contemplative type, are also assigned their specific responsibility within such an organic order, just as specific functions have been allocated to princes, warriors, judges, artisans and peasants."[14]

The church's ambivalence toward ascetic virtuosi is discussed again and at greater length in Weber's study of "hierocratic domination"[15] and its relation to monastic asceticism. Here again, no direct reference is made to the basic issue of the virtuoso–layman interaction adumbrated in his discussion of "contemplative" Buddhist virtuosity. Instead, his analysis focuses on the political advantages of monasticism for ecclesiastical and secular rulers. At this point, it should be noted that although modern comparative historical sociologists are now bent on emphasizing the economic dynamism of monasticism in medieval Christendom, Weber himself was in fact much more attentive to monasticism's politicobureaucratic than economic implications.[16] Although monastic asceticism originated as a method of individual salvation only indirectly and spiritually meant to benefit the entire Christian collective, it was eventually transformed into a most useful tool serving the temporal interests of the Church. This transformation corresponded to the evolution of monasticism from its initially asocial, individual orientations into an institution purveying a wide range of social goals and services. Asceticism, moreover, made monks outstandingly efficient, a fact that led Weber to see in them the first "professionals" and which "predestined them to serve as the principal tool of bureaucratic centralization and rationalization in the Church."

Significantly, Weber mainly discusses the usefulness of monasticism in a Caesaropapist framework, where it could help support the ruler's legiti-

[14] Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 233.

[15] M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New York: Bedminster, 1968), vol. 2, ch. 15.

[16] I have dealt with this issue in greater detail in Silber, "Monasticism and the Protestant Ethic."

macy and domesticate his subjects: "If the political ruler wants to create an apparatus of officials and a counter weight against the nobility . . . he cannot wish for a more reliable support than the influence of the monks on the masses."[17] Although "concessions" and "compromises" are not the key notions here any more, the overall picture emerging is that of a rather conservative (in the sense of contributing to the maintainance of the political status quo) relation between monasticism and social order. Somehow qualifying this heavy stress on the political incorporation of monasticism, Weber recognizes that monasticism could readily establish a strong power base of its own in such a context, and even come to a clash with the temporal authorities to safeguard its religious autonomy. Again, moreover, it should be noted that Weber mostly addresses monasticism within the framework of Caesaropapism, and leaves aside the role of monasticism in the much more decentralized context of Western feudalism, which might have received a fuller analysis had Weber lived to complete his planned study of medieval Catholicism.[18]

This emphasis on the "conservative" political implications of monasticism notwithstanding, Weber was nevertheless bent on giving a part to medieval monasticism in his overall interpretation of the unique development of Western rationalization. After all, he did see monasticism as the ideological matrix from which Protestant inner-worldly ascetic virtuosity fatefully emerged. But he also gave it place of pride in his understanding of the medieval West as a uniquely "restless," check-and-balance type of civilization: "All in all, the specific roots of occidental culture must be sought in the tension and peculiar balance, on the one hand, between office charisma and monasticism, and on the other between the contractual character of the feudal state and the autonomous bureaucratic hierocracy. . . . In the Occident, authority was set against authority, legitimacy against legitimacy, one office charisma against the other."[19] Again, therefore, we see Weber's insistence on Western asceticism as somehow deeply related to and constitutive of the West's uniquely dynamic pattern on rationalization, an interpretation made only more insistent if situated on the backdrop of his contrastive, "mirror image" interpretation of the nature and role of virtuoso asceticism in non-Western, especially Indian and Buddhist, civilizations.

Weber's understanding and categorization of religious virtuosity is intimately related to and confirmed by other aspects of his sociology of religion. Here I shall mention only the significant connection to his discus-

[17] Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 1171.

[18] Revisiting and aiming at reconstructing Weber's (incomplete) interpretation of Western Christendom, see Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Sicht des okzidentalen Christentums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkampf, 1988).

[19] Weber, *Economy and Society*, 1192 We may notice once again, in this oft-quoted passage, Weber's loose assimilation of monasticism with charisma.

sion of types of religious prophecy. As Talcott Parsons has summed it up, "exemplary prophecy tends to produce 'elitist' movements of those who achieve superior religious status, and to leave the others in a state of dubious belongingness, apart from the belongingness they derive from their secular statuses. It is on the basis of ethical prophecy and an order binding on whole categories of persons that anything like a firmly organized 'church' can most readily be built up."[20]

For Weber, thus, not only do religions vary in the status they bestow upon virtuosi, but this varying status is itself intrinsically related to religions' varying capacity to incorporate the laity, to create broader frameworks of "belongingness." The social position of virtuosi is understood to be intimately connected with broader features of their religious and social environment, such as the nature of the religious–ideological matrix from which the virtuosi emerged in the first place (the overriding distinction here being that between exemplary vs. ethical prophecies) and the related structures of collective integration.

This more "structural" and "contextual" approach had already appeared in Weber's analysis of the "functional" incorporation of virtuosi into the Catholic and Caesaropapist social orders. But it was also suggested in a more complex sense in the *Protestant Ethic,* where the virtuoso's momentous "rationalizing" impact stems not from a simplistic model of the influence of religious beliefs on economic behavior, but rather from the historical encounter and consonance – the "elective affinities" – between certain Calvinist religious orientations and the emerging structures of a modern capitalistic system, joining in the formation of a full-fledged and unprecedented capitalistic civilization. A similar tendency to situate virtuosi within the context of broader collective structures was also suggested in Weber's insertion of monasticism as part and parcel of his understanding of the medieval West as a whole, as a check-and-balance type of civilization.

In line, perhaps, with his principled resistance to holistic and systemic interpretations, Weber did not develop this type of global, contextual approach much further. Such an avenue of enquiry, however, might lay bare more persistent, structural factors in the tension-ridden interaction between virtuosi and their social surroundings than conjectural alliances, concessions, and compromises – the recurrent terms of his analysis.[21] As the present study tries to show, it is precisely this kind of more

[20] Weber, *Sociology of Religion,* p. xxxvii.

[21] Pierre Bourdieu proposes to systematize this aspect of Weber's sociology of religion dealing with the interactions, tensions, and transactions between the various groups involved in the same religious field: priests, prophets, laity, and sorcerers. See "Une interprétation de la sociologie religieuse de Max Weber," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 12 (1971). Bourdieu, however, does not deal with the position of virtuosi in this structure of interactions; more funda-

systematic attention to the broader collective structures from which religious virtuosi emerged, and with which they interacted, that might have modified Weber's relative underassessment of the sociological significance of contemplative virtuoso religion as it developed in the framework of Buddhist civilizations.

Beyond Weber: virtuosity and monasticism

Since Weber's time, there has emerged a wealth of studies (mostly historical) of specific religious figures of various kinds corresponding, by and large, to Weber's definition of virtuosi. Some of these studies are especially helpful in drawing attention to aspects of the interaction between virtuosi and society to which he did not attend. Research on mystics and mysticism,[22] or on sainthood in a variety of cultural settings,[23] in particular, may clarify the sociological implications of the more contemplative and/or individual forms of virtuosity that were systematically underplayed in Weber's approach. Peter Brown's work[24] is one of the most recent and challenging contributions in this respect, and will be referred to at a later point in our discussion. Taken collectively, at any rate, this growing body of literature points to a variability and complexity in virtuosi's ideological orientation and institutional expres-

mentally, he does not address the ideological and institutional structures (be they conceived as shaping forces, resources, or constraints) that may variously shape the overall field of interactions.

22 See, for example, "Church, Sect and Mysticism" in *Sociological Analysis*, 36 (1975); James L. Peacock, "Mystics and Merchants in Fourteenth-Century Germany: A Speculative Reconstruction of their Psychological Bond and its Implications for Social Change," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8 (1969): 47–59.

23 Works on saints and holy men are too rapidly multiplying to aim here at an inclusive listing. See, for example, J. Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 357 ff.; J. Mecklin, *The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); S. Czarnowski, *Le Culte des héros et sus conditions sociales: St. Patrick, héros national de l'Irlande*, preface by H. Hubert (Paris: Alcan, 1919); P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); idem, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101; idem, "The Saint as Examplar," *Representations* 1 (1983): 1–25; E. Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); A. Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du Moyen-Age*, (Ecole Française de Rome, 1981); D. Weinstein and R. M. Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); J. S. Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

24 See especially Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man"; idem, "Saint as Examplar"; also, idem, *Cult of the Saints;* idem, "Late Antiquity," in P. Veyne (ed.), *A History of Private Life*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 237–312; idem, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

sion that can hardly be subsumed under Weber's overly dichotomic and elementary typological categories.[25]

What is needed, however, is not so much a refinement of these categories but rather a more precise analysis of the essential features of virtuosity per se, and of its propensity to become the nexus of a range of highly distinctive, and largely overlooked, sociological processes. Weber's concern with the sharp contrasts between different types of virtuosity – especially its "activist–ascetic–ethical" and orgiastic–contemplative–exemplary" poles – has in fact tended to obscure the common features that led him to identify them as expressions of one same phenomenon in the first place, and to understate their common sociological implications.

Most striking, and not much elaborated upon in Weber's analysis, is the emergence and impressive historical resilience of a specialized virtuoso institution: monasticism. Although many (and perhaps all) human societies have some type of religious specialists – priests, prophets, shamans, diviners, and so forth – not all societies have engendered the phenomenon of religious virtuosity, with the implied split between a virtuoso religiosity and a mass religiosity.[26] Even fewer have engendered the institutionalization of religious virtuosity in the form of monasticism. Weber, as noted, strongly emphasized monasticism's professionallike, rational efficiency and political usefulness. As is shown in the next chapter, however, monasticism is also based on profoundly asocial or even antisocial principles (celibacy, withdrawal from general society) and displays a range of ideological and organizational features that make it into a rather precarious type of social formation. Its emergence and historical persistence in certain civilizational settings only, but not in others, is therefore an issue that calls for greater attention and cannot be taken as self-evident.

Although Weber undoubtedly recognized the historical significance of monasticism and its direct relevance to some of the major themes of his work (such as the development of western "rationalization"),[27] he actually gave it very little conceptual and theoretical attention.[28] It is also a

[25] See Schluchter, "Weltflüchtiges Erlösungstreben," especially pp. 35–43.

[26] Weber never uses the term in contexts other than that of the so-called great traditions.

[27] I have examined this aspect of Weber's work in greater detail, although only with respect to the narrower issue of economic rationalization, in Silber, "Monasticism and the Protestant Ethic."

[28] This is perhaps most conspicuous in contrast to his famed typological elaboration of "church" versus "sect." Beyond these two major types of organizations, his attention, like Troeltsch's, rather focused on mysticism. See the issue "Church, Sect and Mysticism" in *Sociological Analysis* 36, no. 3 (1975). This, in conjunction with the fact that he did not clearly articulate the relationship between virtuosity and charisma, reinforces the feeling that there is here a range of religious phenomena that have not received a full and systematic treatment in the Weberian scheme.

further indication of his failure to tackle the issue of virtuosity in a fully systematic fashion that he did not address the distinction (and mutual relation) between virtuosity in its more organized and corporate, monastic form, and in its less organized, more individual, or withdrawn manifestations. Although aware of the withdrawal from normal social relations that tends to accompany the virtuoso's single-minded pursuit of religious ends,[29] he paid no attention to the more radically individual and/or withdrawn, eremitic forms of virtuosity. Nor did he consider the element of voluntary withdrawal remaining present even in organized, monastic forms of virtuosity, or the part that this may play in the interaction between monasticism and society at large. What monopolized his attention, on the contrary, were monasticism's bureaucratic functions and overall political incorporation.

The virtuoso–layman interaction

The analysis to be advanced here will stress the development of an extensive pattern of material and symbolic exchange between virtuosi and laymen, epitomized in a gift relationship (laymen giving, monks receiving) that developed on a massive scale in both Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism. This will mean drawing systematic comparative attention to an axis of interaction with society that, as mentioned, received unequal treatment in Weber's case studies. Noted in the "Buddhist–Jainist" context – but also quickly dismissed as involving a commercialized relation of "magical anthropolatry" of no serious "ethical" impact – it was not systematically followed up in any of the other civilizational settings that Weber addressed. (This unequal treatment, incidentally, is consonant with the fact that processes of exchange do not receive much theoretical weight in Weberian sociology.)[30]

The pattern of exchange between virtuoso and layman, and its reproduction over centuries, I submit, is of crucial significance in understanding both the resilience of monasticism as a specific and far from self-

29 See, for example, Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, p. 166.

30 A similar emphasis on exchange has been recently developed by Bryan Turner, albeit from a different theoretical perspective and with a different appraisal of Weber's sociology of religion. See B. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory: A Materialist Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1983) ch. 4. I, of course, fully agree that Weber's typological distinction of virtuoso and mass religiosity has been strangely neglected (p. 89). However, I also believe that Turner tends to inflate the presence, in Weber's sociology of religion, of the assumption of an exchange relationship between virtuosi and the mass, especially one entailing "an implicit parallel between economic and religious systems." Whereas Turner sees the relationship geared to the need of the religious elites "to exchange the benefits of charisma for various forms of payment and tribute in order to maintain their separation from labour and the market place," I prefer to develop a less "economic," more Maussian conception of this exchange as gift relationship.

evident social formation, and its different institutional characteristics in the two cases under study.

Moreover, the existence of a gift relationship as understood since Marcel Mauss,[31] is important in that it signals a very special type of interaction and exchange. On the one hand, the gift is supposed to deny reciprocity and situate itself outside the normal range of transactions and exchange (it is in fact an insult under certain circumstances to return a gift, or return it too quickly). On the other hand, the gift also represents an important mechanism of solidarity and reciprocity in the long range. Mauss himself was interested in the functioning of this mechanism of solidarity as a "total phenomenon," that is, as touching upon many levels of social life in different social settings. Here, the gift relationship between monks and laymen will be shown to form an integral aspect of a broader and complex sociological phenomenon, the virtuoso–society syndrome.

Focusing on the virtuoso–layman axis of interaction and exchange also has the important advantage of mitigating the pervasive elitist orientation of Weber's sociology of religion. Consistently investing religious elites, virtuoso or otherwise, with a dominant, shaping impact in the history of civilizations, Weber typically treated "mass religion" as a residual category, often synonymous to "peasant religion," and usually endowed with heavily depreciative connotations of passivity, irrationality, and reliance on magical, "primitive" ritual and symbolic orientations. Although certainly not contradicting Weber's emphasis on the crucial significance of religious elites, I shall at least underline their lasting involvement in, and dependence upon, a relationship of interaction and exchange in which the laity (still massively, if not solely, rural in character throughout most of the period discussed) emerges as a crucial and active partner.

A more systematic comparative emphasis on the relationship with the laity will also enable us to counteract a pervasive slant in Weber's underestimation of the impact of "otherworldly" religious orientations in general, and of Buddhist virtuosity in particular. This bias is clearly rooted in Weber's overriding concern with the varying potential of different civilizations for rationalization and rationalized activity in the world and with the unique development and features of rationality in the West. In his comparative scheme, Puritan Calvinism often provided the fundamental frame of reference, the epitome and prototype of a religiously anchored, rationalized involvement in the world. I shall not so much focus, however, on the already richly discussed issue of whether Buddhism was or was not able to engender orientations furthering economic and political worldly rationalized and dynamism approximating the modern Western model.[32] More central to my purpose is to bring into relief a very distinctive type of

[31] M. Mauss, *The Gift* (New York: Norton, 1976).
[32] See the Introduction, fn. 18.

Buddhist social construction – deriving at least in part from Buddhist otherworldly orientations – whose far-reaching "worldly" significance has to be understood independently of the approximation to a Western model of economic and political dynamism and/or rationality.

In my view, the virtuoso–laity structure of interaction was a principle of no less, and perhaps even greater, social scope and impact in Theravada Southeast Asia than the better-known mechanisms of institution building derived from more worldly or "rational" cultural orientations in the Christian West. The institutional implications of the virtuoso–laity structure of interaction in Theravada Buddhism must be assessed according to different criteria of social significance and vitality than those used by Weber, and compared, not with late-Christian, Protestant developments, but with the earlier, medieval stages in the history of Christian virtuosity.

The significance of the virtuoso–laity axis of interaction can be understood, however, only within the overall field of social relations. Emphasizing the virtuoso–layman interaction, therefore, is not meant to diminish the importance of the other facets of the interaction between virtuosi and society brought out in Weber's work, such as the relations with the religious establishment and the political center.[33] The intent, rather, is to underline the importance of this interaction as an important and overlooked parameter in the operation of macrosocietal structures, no less and at times even more crucial than the more obvious and better-studied interaction between religious and political establishment – of which the Western church-and-state dynamics provide a major prototype. Last but not least, focusing on the virtuoso–layman relation enables us to clarify the relationship between virtuosity and charisma – one of Weber's best-known legacies to the social sciences.

Virtuosity and charisma

Although Weber did occasionally use the word "charisma" in connection with religious virtuosi, he never tried to articulate the analytical or empirical relationship between the two phenomena.[34] (This is noticeable in

[33] On the contrary, this should contribute to the analysis of monasticism as part of a field of interacting as well as competing social groups, including the laity itself. This is in part compatible, once again, with Bourdieu's suggested reading of Weber (see this chapter, fn. 21). Bourdieu, however, emphasizes the competition for power *over* the laity only, in terms of social groups' different capacities to mobilize the laity's resources (material or otherwise). In that specific regard, it seems possible to read Weber as addressing "power" over the laity primarily in terms of ethical impact – albeit also facilitating thereby, in the case of monasticism, a process of "domestication of the masses" ultimately benefiting both ecclesiastical and political rulers.

[34] See, for example, his definition of religious virtuosi at the beginning of this chapter and in fn. 1.

his very definition of religious virtuosi quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and in the later quote, assessing the tense balance of occidental culture, where monasticism is implicitly and loosely credited with charisma.) This relative neglect, moreover, is all the more striking in light of the crucial role attributed to religious virtuosi in his comparative analysis of civilizations in general, and of Western uniqueness in particular.

Religious virtuosi may become, but are not necessarily, charismatic leaders; they are not necessarily connected with especially dramatic, highly emotional movements; and they are not necessarily either especially disruptive or dramatically creative. In short, religious virtuosi are not necessarily a "hot," but rather a cold – or at any rate a cooler – phenomenon. The analogy from the arts and music may be relevant: There the term virtuosity has come to connote an exceptional level of proficiency and technical excellence, not necessarily coincidental with the more "charismatic" notions of artistic creativity or innovative genius. (Weber himself does not develop that contrast, and as already mentioned, does not attach to the term virtuosity any of its possible pejorative contemporary connotations.) Nevertheless, ascetic virtuosi have hardly left society indifferent; their virtuosity, to pursue the artistic metaphor, has not lacked audience. It has had, in fact, a tremendous appeal, and one with an interesting contrast to that usually associated with the idea of genuine charisma – a theme we shall expand upon in Chapter 10. Understanding this appeal, I submit, can add an important and neglected dimension to the general comprehension of cultural–ideological elites and their patterns of impingement upon society at large.

To some extent, admittedly, virtuosity may be understood as anchored in the charismatic impulse in the most extensive sense of that term, pertaining to the quest for a meaningful order and for the sense of a fundamental connection to the realm of ultimate meaning. In that broader sense indeed, as propounded by Edward Shils and S. N. Eisenstadt,[35] religious virtuosity in general and monasticism in particular may be seen as one of the most extreme and most autonomous expressions, both ideologically and institutionally, of the charismatic motif in the history of human civilization. The central concern of virtuoso asceticism, at least in its original impulse, is the single-minded pursuit of ultimate religious ends. It is also that essentially "charismatic" impulse that leads to the effort to systematically pattern the virtuoso's way of life in accordance with these ends, and to the methodical avoidance, through asceticism and withdrawal, of whatever is perceived as apt to

[35] See E. Shils, "Charisma, Order and Status," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 199–213; S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution-Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), especially pp. ix–lvi.

interfere with that end. However, a closer analysis of monasticism, and of the complex pattern of interaction that has tended to develop between monks and laity, discloses a number of features at variance with those associated with either "pure," "routinized," or "institutional" charisma, at least in Weber's original (albeit not always consistent) usage of those terms – as we shall explain in Chapter 10. If there is charisma in regard to religious virtuosity, it is of a sort that clearly indicates the need for a more refined spectrum of categories to account for the many and contradictory expressions of charisma as an essentially multifaceted and protean phenomenon.

Weber's work, in sum, is of seminal importance in suggesting the distinctiveness of religious virtuosity as a sociological phenomenon, and its significance for the comparative sociological study of civilizations. On the other hand, as we have seen, his approach suffered from important biases and limitations. The next chapter highlights aspects of the relation between virtuosi and society that were understated in the Weberian approach, first by further elucidating the distinctive features of monasticism as a virtuoso institution, and second by reviewing and criticizing a number of interpretations that offer, loosely speaking, a Durkheimian or "functionalist" counterpart to the Weberian approach.

Fundamentally, however, this book remains very much in line with Weber's overall enterprise. Not only does it take Weber's notion and analysis of virtuosity as a starting point, but it also applies a combination of ideal-type analysis and comparative historical research, two distinctly Weberian methodological tools. More important, it is also Weberian, I believe, in adopting a multidimensional and nondeterministic style of explanation that gives much weight to religious–cultural orientations and collective structures of meaning, while also emphasizing the need to take into account a whole constellation of sociostructural variables. Where it perhaps both pursues and goes beyond Weber is in the fuller elaboration of virtuosity, the elaboration of new comparative parameters, and a new (if not necessarily opposed) comparative assessment of the social significance of occidental versus Asian forms of religious virtuosity. Finally, this book expands upon Weber's basic concern with the interpretation of meaning, but also enriches it with other and newer forms of symbolic and cultural analysis, by trying, in the final chapter, to better define the precise significance of religious–ideological orientations as they become a necessary ingredient of the interaction between virtuoso elites and society, and a constitutive dimension of the social order at large.

2 Monasticism and social order: a multidimensional comparative perspective

In line with Weber's general attentiveness to the ideal–typical features of religious institutions, but also compensating for his failure to direct this very same attentiveness to monasticism, the first task of this chapter is to highlight the distinctive features of monasticism as a specific type of religious organization. I shall aim here, in contrast to the existing literature on the topic, at a conceptual approach potentially applicable to "traditional" forms of monasticism in either East or West, and resolutely viewing monastic institutions as partaking of and interacting with broader sociocultural frameworks.

Reaching for a fuller and more contextual understanding of monasticism will throw light on religious virtuosity not only as a specific type of religious orientation giving rise to a specific type of religious elite or institution, but also as a central dimension in the dynamics of the two world religions compared. The result, ultimately, is a modified comparative perception of these two civilizations that uncovers both historical similarities and differences not yet been brought into relief in Weber's or other macrocomparative accounts, and that inscribes virtuoso asceticism as a vital factor not only in the rise of the West, but also in the ideological expansion and tenacity of the Buddhist East.

Monasticism as virtuoso institution and "alternative structure"

A most essential feature of monasticism is its marginal, even antithetical character vis-à-vis society at large. The monastic way of life contradicts normal patterns of behavior in the most basic parameters of ordinary human life such as sex, food, kinship, and property, to mention only the most salient. Adhering to an atypical and in many ways asocial type of behavior, monks voluntarily opt out of social life as commonly defined. This withdrawal can even assume a spatial dimension, leading to seclusion in faraway, unpopulated areas such as deserts and forests, or on the fringes of human settlements.

As such, monks have often been perceived as marginal phenomena of minor social significance. Some attention, however, has been paid to the internal features of monasticism as a type of social formation, and comparisons have been made with modern closed, total institutions or with

the various communal experiments of Western counterculture.[1] Monasticism has also been scrutinized for its typological similarities with and differences from the sect type of religious organization.[2] In general, however, the tendency has been to relate to monasticism as a thing in itself rather than as part of a wider sociocultural context. Furthermore, sociological research on the topic has generally been limited to contemporary settings and Christian forms of monasticism.

It is important to underscore, however, some important contributions of this Christian-based body of sociological analysis. To begin with, the similarities to total institutions are suggestive indeed. Monastic daily life is fully scheduled, planned in its smallest details, and rationalized, besides requiring total immersion of the individual in the community and total obedience to authority. The rites of passage upon entrance are also similar, entailing social leveling and the relinquishing of all signs of one's previous life and status. The essential difference remains, obviously, that the entry into monasticism is based on an ideological and fully voluntary individual choice (at least in theory). This very basic difference notwithstanding, it is remarkable that religious opting out, while essentially motivated by a purely individual search for salvation, was able to spawn a communal framework characterized by a tighter, "greedier" structure than most ordinary social frameworks. In a paradox worth underlining, radically asocial and even antisocial orientations gave rise to a remarkably powerful form of social organization: "It is the withdrawal from normal social order and the turning toward a spiritual, supra-mundane world, and not the vision of a new social order, which led to the formation of a new, historically exceptionally enduring and influential form of life."[3]

[1] E. Goffman, *Asylums* (Chicago: Aldine, 1961), pp. 4–5; G. A. Hillery, Jr., "The Convent: Community, Prison or Task Force?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8 (1969): 140–51; E. Servais and F. Hambye, "Structure et méthode: problème et méthode en sociologie des organisations claustrales," *Social Compass* 18 (1971): 27–44; G. A. Hillery and P. C. Morrow, "The Monastery as a Commune," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 6 (1976): 139–54; L. Moulin, "Pour une sociologie des ordres religieux," *Social Compass* 10 (1963): 145–70; H. P. M. Goddijn, "The Sociology of Religious Orders and Congregations," *Social Compass* 7 (1960): 431–47; M. Ple (ed.), *La séparation du monde* (Paris: Cerf, 1901); Y. Zerubavel, "The Benedictine Ethic and the Modern Spirit of Scheduling: On Schedules and Social Organization," *Sociological Inquiry* 50 (1980): 157–69.

[2] M. Hill, "Typologie sociologique de l'ordre religieux," *Social Compass* 17 (1971): 45–64; idem, *A Sociology of Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 84–7; idem, *Religious Order* – to which we shall refer again in the last part of this work in relation to a typological definition of religious virtuosity in general.

[3] W. Bergman, "Das frühe Mönchtum als soziale Bewegung," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 37 (1985): 32. In this respect, monasticism is an extreme expression of the religion/rationality paradox so central to Weber's concerns: Underpinning the formation of a capitalistic civilization was a

Another feature of monasticism emphasized in Christian-based material is its basically conservative nature, for all that it entails elements of potentially subversive criticism of society at large. This is suggested in Joachim Wach's characterization of monasticism as "protest within"[4] and Michael Hill's typological analysis of the religious order (both monastic and nonmonastic) as a "sect within the Church," distinguished from the sect proper by its acceptance of an external, ecclesiastical source of authority.[5] The combination of subversive and conservative elements is even more forcefully emphasized in Jean Seguy's analysis of monasticism as both "utopia" – that is, entailing the model of an alternative, perfect mirror society – and "implicit protest," a form of criticism or dissent remaining within the bounds of the established order of things.[6]

A convenient way to sum up these opposing features of monasticism is to borrow, with some modification, Victor Turner's well-known notions of structure and antistructure.[7] Antistructure, in Turner's work, refers to a property of certain conditions or situations in social life – usually temporary, transitory, and "liminal" – that makes them particularly conducive to solidary, nonhierarchical modes of fellowship. Monasticism may contain a strong element of such antistructure: It definitely entails strong egalitarian aspects, elements of status leveling and destructuration, and many tenets antithetical to ordinary social life and structure. No less

process of increased "practical" rationalization (*Zweckrationalitat*) rooted, in part, in religious motivations – usually taken as arch-irrational but constitutive, for Weber, of "substantive" rationality (*Wertrationalitat*). In monasticism, too, we see a powerful and rationalized organization rooted in religious orientations, and no less paradoxically, in asocial and even antisocial orientations. On Weber's typology of forms of rationality, see Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality"; Swidler, "Concept of Rationality."

[4] Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 156–205.

[5] See this chapter, fn. 2. M. Hill sees many parallels between sects and religious orders: Both are voluntary associations; membership in both is achieved by proof of merit, however defined, be it on the basis only of a high level of commitment; both emphasize exclusiveness, and expulse their deviants; both carry the self-conception of an elect; both have personal perfection as their goal; both have a totalitarian hold over their members (more systematically so in the order than in the sect); finally, both characteristically tend, if in different ways and degrees, to keep apart from "the world." The differences however, as he sees them, are crucial. First, orders, being part of a wider institutional church, rely on a source of authority that is ultimately external, though they may be permitted a considerable degree of organizaional autonomy in their internal arrangements. Sects, on the other hand, are self-legitimating and rely on no external sanctions in regulating their beliefs and structure. Second, sects are very rarely celibate.

[6] J. Seguy, "Une sociologie des societés imaginées: monachisme et utopie," *Annales E.S.C.* 26 (1971): 328–54; idem, "Pour une sociologie de l'ordre religieux," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 57 (1984): 55–68.

[7] See, for example, V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolical Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), especially the chapter, "Metaphors of Anti-Structure in Religious Culture," pp. 272–300.

important, it shares with liminal or antistructural situations the distinctive element of withdrawal from normal social life. At the same time, however, it is not a passing phase in human relationships but a highly institutionalized structure in itself, eventually becoming an integral part of the wider social structure. Hence it might be useful to perceive in monasticism not so much antistructure as a type of "alternative structure," characterized by a tight intermingling of structural and antistructural elements. It is precisely this dense interweaving of structure and antistructure, I submit, that distinguishes monasticism from other social institutions and makes it a kind of "alternative" structure within society at large.[8]

Precariousness of the monastic institution

This leads us to a feature of monasticism that has not received systematic treatment, namely, that its potential for interweaving antistructural and structural elements does not prevent the monastic institution from being a most fragile social formation. Like total institutions, but also like any other type of social organization, monasticism has to meet a variety of common organizational problems, such as the maintenance of internal discipline and commitment; recruitment; material needs (food, clothing, housing, and instruments of the liturgy); management of property; contact with and protection from the outer world; self-perpetuation; and so forth. However, given the need to maintain and weave together both structure and antistructure, some of these ordinary problems are posed in especially acute fashion in the case of monasticism, confronting it with a range of problems and dilemmas that in the long run are apt to undermine its institutional resilience.

To begin with, the problem of regulating the interaction with the external world, admittedly present to some degree in any boundary-maintaining social formation, is made more acute by the ideology of social withdrawal intrinsic to monasticism's self-definition, and by the need to develop insulating mechanisms to that effect. A basic dilemma here is to define and control the degree of insulation versus involvement, and autonomization versus incorporation within the wider social environment. A related problem is that of self-perpetuation: Being based on celibacy, monasticism is deprived of one of the most basic mechanisms of social reproduction and must rely on the external world from which it withdraws for recruitment and continuity. It also lacks the natural or at least explicit exercise of a number of other mechanisms of

[8] I have further developed this theme in Silber, "'Opting Out' in Theravada Buddhism and Medieval Christianity: A Comparative Look at Monasticism as Alternative Structure," *Religion* 15 (1988): 251–77.

social integration and regulation, such as the whole range of incentives and sanctions usually associated with an individual's material advancement or family ties.

At the ideological level, a major source of precariousness lies in monasticism's virtuoso dimension itself, that is, its commitment to a rigorous ascetic discipline and search for perfection, the enactment of which is most arduous and problematic by definition. It is important to note, however, that a large share of monasticism's fragility in this regard seems to stem, paradoxically, precisely from the very same ascetic–rationalizatory orientations enhancing its capacity for a powerful, total type of organization. This is most evident in monasticism's tendency to accumulate wealth as a result of the ascetic limits on consumption, and of a rationalized collective management of labor and property – wealth in turn threatening its basic vocation of poverty and asceticism, and constituting a major spur to corruption and decline.

Ascetic rationality and efficiency may also become a source of instability and precariousness by encouraging the increasing "social functionalization" of monasticism, that is, the harnessing of its special efficiency to a variety of social, extramonastic (be they secular or religious) goals. Such a trend, stressed in Weber's analysis of Christian monasticism, cannot but threaten the insulation and segregation deemed necessary to monasticism's special vocation and purity.

Moreover, monasticism may be challenged not only by trends that weaken its insularity or bring about its corruption, but also by the forces of virtuoso "ultracism" or "radicalism"[9] emerging from its own midst. These typically develop as a reaction to what they perceive as corruption and decline, and entail the call for a return to a purer, more rigorous enactment of the monastic vocation. In this respect, monasticism may be said to engender its own criticism and to be susceptible to recurrent waves of reformism. These may be seen, to some extent, as an innate mechanism for revitalizing monasticism as a virtuoso institution. Perhaps more essentially, however, monasticism may have to cope with the

[9] The two are present and closely related in each case, but I shall use only "radicalism" from now on simply because it is a more common notion. Ultracism is used here in the sense of "holding of extreme opinions on any question," and connotes the desire to bring religious virtuosity to its maximum possible expression. Radicalism, however, which may be seen as another variant of extremism, adds the notion of "going to the root or origin," and of touching upon what is essential and fundamental (extremism may be displayed on questions of minor importance, although it is only triggered as a rule by issues perceived as fundamental). This is close to the definition of Christian radicalism as "a concern with religious criticism and reform based on the roots of Christianity, especially the New Testament roots" developed by Rosalind and Christopher Brooke in *Popular Religion in the Middle-Ages* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984).

internal conflict and segmentation resulting from different interpretations of the monastic ideal, and especially with the perennial tension between more and less radical definitions of withdrawal from the world. A particular aspect of that problem is the tension between communal ("cenobitic") versus individual and solitary ("eremitic," although the word has also been applied to some forms of limited cenobitism) forms of virtuoso renunciation. Challenge may also come, however, from an altogether different direction: from forms of religious virtuosity that develop outside, or even against, the monastic framework.

It should be clear at this point that although the institutionalization of virtuosity could give rise, in the shape of monasticism, to the impressive phenomenon of "alternative structures" characterized by a tight interweaving of structural and antistructural elements, these alternative structures retain an intrinsic precariousness that makes their very existence and historical resilience far from self-evident. How, then, are we to account for the emergence and persistence of such virtuoso alternative structures and for the place they came to occupy within society as a whole? To answer this question, we should consider some general interpretations of the relationship between religious virtuosi and the social order that offer, loosely speaking, a functionalist counterpart to the Weberian approach. By functionalist, I refer to the tendency to interpret virtuosi as fulfilling certain functions in answer to certain needs of society (whatever the extent to which the latter is explicitly considered as a closed and systemic entity – a central feature of rigid forms of functionalism only). Although not devoid of serious inadequacies, these functionalist interpretations do have the merit of highlighting a number of aspects of the interaction between religious virtuosi and society that will have to be taken into account in any attempt at a comprehensive sociological understanding of the subject.

Virtuosity and social order: the functionalist approach

A first and clear example of functionalist interpretation of the relation between religious virtuosi and society is found in Emile Durkheim's work (not too surprisingly, since Durkheim is often noted to have anticipated many features of modern functionalism). Addressing himself to virtuoso ascetics in general, rather than to monasticism in particular, Durkheim suggests a rather straightforward connection between virtuosi and the realm of central social values. Briefly, virtuoso ascetics are said to represent the extreme expression of values and norms that other people enact much more moderately and imperfectly, not only in the religious sphere but in social life in general; virtuoso asceticism constitutes the symbolic form of the basic asceticism inherent in all social life

and fulfills the exemplary function of "keeping norms too high, so that they should not sink too low."[10]

A more complex normative function is attributed to virtuoso ascetics in what may be called the safety-valve model. In this model, societies would assign to monasticism, as a special, insulated sector, roles and orientations whose legitimacy they cannot utterly deny but which entail a subversive, antisocial, or antistructural potential.[11] This type of interpretation has also been advanced for individual forms of virtuoso asceticism, most notably in Louis Dumont's analysis of renunciation in India.[12] A notable variant is to be found in Shils's notion of "segregation of charisma":

> All societies seek to make some provision for those persons whose actions are impelled by the possession of charismatic legitimacy. Within religious systems, the cenobitic or anchoritic monastic orders are institutional frameworks for the segregation and control of the charismatically endowed, i.e., those who are prone to experience a sense of direct contact with transcendental powers. . . . By segregation, the custodians of the routine spheres of life show both their apprehension of the disruptive nature of intense and concentrated charisma and appreciation of a virtue requiring acknowledgement. . . . A continuous reinforcement of the barriers against a free movement of charismatic persons is carried on by the custodians of the routine order.[13]

In this approach, virtuosi are still connected to the realm of central values, but a strong element of ambivalence is introduced: Virtuosi represent something that is considered potentially disruptive, yet has a place in the collective set of values. Correspondingly, segregation is the sign of both apprehension and deference on the part of nonvirtuosi. Although the notion of segregation is perhaps unjustifiably loaded with coercive connotations in Shils's formulation, it has the merit of perceiving the monastic institution as to a large extent the result of forces and pressures from the broader environment.

These interpretations have a number of shortcomings. First, they do not address the variability in patterns of interaction between monasti-

10 E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1965), especially p. 356.

11 See, for example, Hill, "Typologie sociologique," 60; E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church* (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1931); E. Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 121–34. On Christian monasticism as containing and domesticating potentially anarchic tendencies, see L. Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), especially p. 59.

12 L. Dumont, "World-Renunciation in Indian Religions," in *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 46. Also N. Yalman, "The Ascetic Buddhist Monks of Ceylon," *Ethnology* 1 (1962): 315–28; R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity* (London: Athlone, 1976), p. 89.

13 Shils, *Center and Periphery,* p. 130.

cism and society in different historical and civilizational settings. Moreover, they tend to see monastics and/or other virtuosi as fulfilling specific functions and contributing to the overall normative integration and well-being of the social order. Such an approach overlooks the element of conflict and competition, of cultural and political power games and compromises between the virtuoso and other social sectors, which was rightly if excessively emphasized by Weber. It also takes for granted, in a quasi-mechanistic fashion, the persistence through time of the "safety valve" or "segregation" process, and relatedly, of the monastic institution. Moreover, these interpretations present an altogether monolithic image of virtuoso ascetics in general and monasticism in particular, ignoring the inner differentiation and tensions within the virtuoso sector itself. Both the presence of clashing conceptions of the monastic life and the relation between monasticism and other forms of virtuosity could introduce a strong element of dynamism into a picture that tends to be overly conservative and static.

Virtuosity and power

The interpretations offered hitherto have assumed a rather stable relationship between virtuoso ascetics and society, even if they are not necessarily segregated in monastic enclaves. However, it is important to consider another, more dynamic aspect of virtuoso asceticism, stemming from the potential of systematic asceticism and withdrawal from the world to generate not only rational efficiency and communal institutions, but also a type of charismatic, supernatural prestige that may in turn be converted into innovative influence or power in the world.

This "convertible" aspect of virtuoso asceticism is brought into relief in Peter Brown's famed analysis of the rise and function of the holy man in late Roman society.[14] The holy men he describes are hermits living either in the desert or at the edge of villages, "athletes of God" conquering their body in spectacular feats of mortification, and initially met with hostility and suspicion. In the wake of economic trends that greatly weakened the large landowners and their former functions of village patronage, these usually poorly integrated communities became needful of an external source of authority that could mediate between them and the outside world, as well as among the villagers themselves. This need came to focus on the holy man – the stranger par excellence. Crucial to the holy man's success as a mediator was "the deep social significance of asceticism as a long, drawn out, solemn ritual of dissociation" from all social ties, that lent him the objectivity and certainty men desperately needed in a society

[14] Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man."

marked by the erosion of institutions at every level of life."[15] His rise coincided with institutional decline; hence it is no accident, according to Brown, that his position later deteriorated with the reassertion and renewal of collective institutions. Although this analysis stresses the determinant impact of social–institutional, contextual factors on the rise and decline of this type of holy men, it also recognizes the influence of a certain ideological climate – a widespread need for "certainty." In contrast with the other interpretations already examined, no importance is given to more specific value contents, or to a realm of central ideals. (Brown himself has acknowledged this as a flaw in a later essay in which he starts exploring the symbolic and religious meaning – rather than only the social functions – of the holy man as Christian exemplar.)[16] Be that as it may, Brown's analysis accords with the previous ones in identifying the function of the virtuoso ascetics as rather "conservative" in kind – filling an institutional vacuum, and providing an alternative to functions previously filled by now-eroded institutions.

Virtuosity and change

The convertibility of ascetic prestige into influence and worldly power can also proceed, however, in a less conservative and more innovative direction. This is pointed out in Dumont's seminal analysis of Indian renunciation, already alluded to,[17] which supports the safety-valve model, but combines it with a stress on the dynamic, innovative potential of virtuoso ascetics. The relation between the renouncer and the man in the world, in Dumont's perspective, is one of antithesis and complementarity. The renouncer "dies" to the world and to all caste distinctions and interdependence; moveover, even as he opts out of the world and is overtly striving at total extinction, he becomes invested with (quasi-occidental) individuality, something for which caste society has no room. Significantly, renunciation is often represented as the last and supreme among the four stages of life of the Brahman, an acceptable option only after worldly obligations have been carried out. Dumont sees here a subdued hostility to renunciation itself: Renouncers represent a transcedence and sacredness that are acknowledged as such

[15] Ibid., p. 91.

[16] Brown, "Saint as Examplar." Notwithstanding the similarity in terms, it is not clear whether Brown invests the saint as holy exemplar with "exemplary" meaning (or function) in either Durkheim's or Weber's sense; what he explicitly calls for, rather, is a newer, Geertzian style of cultural analysis (although the two, of course, are far from incompatible). I believe a close reading of Brown's other writings all closely relevant to the topic (see Chapter 1, fn. 19), would reveal a more complex and perhaps not altogether consequent conception of the relation between virtuoso ascetics and society.

[17] See this chapter, fn. 11.

by the man in the world, but allowed to develop only outside, or at the limits, of the social order as commonly understood – a conception very close to Shils's "segregation of charisma." Renunciation thereby functions as a safety valve for the Brahmanic order that finds in it a way to reserve a permanent niche for the transcendent without posing a threat to the everyday life in the world. Most significantly for the present discussion, however, renouncers have been, according to Dumont, the major element of development and innovation in Indian religion. They have been at the origin of all sects, which themselves display features characteristic of renunciation, transcending caste without denying it, and superimposing a religion of individual choice upon common religion, rather than negating it.

Dumont's approach is thus double-edged: It relates virtuoso and society in terms of antithesis and complementarity within a global, encompassing structure. With the idea of renunciation as a safety valve, it may seem to lead to just another instance of functionalist interpretation. On the other hand, it also emphasizes the voluntariness and individuality inherent in the virtuoso's extraordinary option, and the subversive and innovative potential that may become attached to it.

Both Brown's and Dumont's studies, therefore, have underlined that ascetic withdrawal may become the basis of power in the world and possess a dynamic, innovative potential. No less crucially, they underline virtuosi's potential mobility or fluidity, not only in the move in social position from marginal to central, from conservative to innovative, or from orthodox to heterodox, but also in the possibility of their decline or deinstitutionalization. No attempt has yet been made, however, to define the conditions facilitating or blocking the emergence of such dynamics in different historical contexts – an issue that we begin to confront, while also extending it to monasticism more particularly, in the framework of the present comparative enquiry.

A multidimensional comparative approach

Coming back, then, to monasticism proper, I propose to approach it as a social formation with its own internal demands and dynamics but standing in a close dialectical relation to the social and cultural environment in which it sustained itself over time. Differences in the ways of coping with the basic dilemmas it faced – segregation versus involvement, autonomization versus social functionalization or incorporation, acceptance or refusal of power (and of what kind of power) in the world – and in the resulting patterns of interaction with society, will be shown to have evolved under the combined impact of different cultural and institutional environments. Monasticism, therefore, may be said to constitute

not only a reversal, but also a reflection or reproduction of the social order at large; it may be approached as a cultural variable shaped by a constellation of factors that the comparative analysis should help us to circumscribe.

I shall show, first, that the extraordinary resilience and central social position of so inherently precarious and non–self-reproducing an institution as monasticism relied in these two cases on very different, even contrasting patterns of institutionalization; second, that these variations in patterns of institutionalization were shaped by major ideological and institutional characteristics of the civilizational contexts with which monasticism interacted; third, that partial convergence seems to have obtained for a while, resulting in a rather similar constellation of characteristics in the relation between virtuosi and society.

The presentation of each case study will proceed in three major sections. The first section will deal with the ideological groundings for the emergence of religious virtuosity in general and monasticism in particular, and for a specific pattern of interaction between virtuosi and society. The second section will analyze monasticism and the dynamics of its interaction with society at large at the institutional level, in relation to basic institutional features (economic, social, and political) of the macrosocietal context. The third part will focus on the forces of virtuoso radicalism that emerged from inside or outside the monastic institution in each setting, and will consider their role in maintaining or undermining the dominant pattern of institutionalization described in the second section.

This division into three sections is mostly a matter of exposition, however; a major aim of this work will be to convey the interconnectedness and mutual reinforcement of the various influences involved as these played themselves out in the course of history. Before doing so, though, we must sort out the variables with which each section will be dealing, and that will form the building blocks of our comparative analysis.

A. The ideological groundings

The emergence and resilience of monasticism in these two civilizational settings cannot be understood independently of its relation to the realm of central, ultimate collective values – albeit not the straightforward, "exemplary" relation of the Durkheimian model. More precisely, monasticism should be understood in relation to the inner contradictions of religious systems propounding ideals that are not fully applicable or not incumbent upon all, while also developing into world religions, that is, religions mustering mass allegiance and operating as the central value system of macrosocietal, civilizational entities. Although this type of con-

tradiction is present to some extent in many cultural systems, it has been recognized as particularly salient in "otherworldly" or "outworldly" civilizations.[18] Such is the case of Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism, usually characterized in post-Weberian language as incorporating a strong strand of otherworldly orientations in their central value systems.[19] Both civilizations are geared, at least in part, to cultural orientations inimical to the valorization of society and its mundane concerns,[20] and promoting ideals of perfection and self-transcendance that are obviously not applicable to all.

From this point of view, monasticism may be said to represent the closest embodiment of the otherworldly impulse in both contexts, and to constitute – as intimated in some functionalist models already referred to – a convenient way of maintaining, yet also neutralizing, world-rejecting orientations and their obviously antisocial, anti-institutional implications. No religion, however, can be totally otherworldly: "If it were, it would not survive its founder, let alone succeed in creating social structures, shaping cultures and producing continuities."[21] A crucial factor to be considered, therefore, is not only the prominence of the otherworldly motif in the two religious systems under study, but also its specific mode of coexistence with more worldly motifs. This mode of coexistence will be shown to help account for the varying types of religious virtuosi that emerged in each setting, their orientations toward the social order, and in particular, the different ways in which monasticism coped with the dilemmas posed by its interaction with society at large.

No less fundamental, however, than the relative strength and position of the otherworldly impulse in each case are the ideological structures developed to maintain it as part and parcel of a world religion – a variable hinted at, but not systematically considered, in the classic Weberian framework. Of particular importance here is the extent to which the religious matrix appears to encourage the emergence of a religious double standard distinguishing between an elite search for perfection and a

[18] I use here interchangeably "outworldly" and "otherworldly," although outworldly seems to me preferable to otherworldly, which is of more common usage, and which may be mistaken to connote the belief in a world afterlife, found also in religions that do not devaluate or reject the world here and now.

[19] On this paradox of otherworldly civilizations, see Eisenstadt, "Die Paradoxie."

[20] Detailed discussion of this common feature of Christianity and Theravada Buddhism, although couched in slightly different terms, can be found in F. Reynolds, "Contrasting Modes of Action: A Comparative Study of Buddhist and Christian Ethics," *History of Religion* 20 (1980):128–46. See also the recent debate on Christian (mainly early) vs. Indian and (Buddhist) "outworldliness" in Dumont, "Modified View"; followed by R. N. Bellah, K. Burridge, and R. Robertson, "Responses to Louis Dumont," *Religion* 12 (1982): 83–8, and S. N. Eisenstadt, "Transcendental Visions – Other-Worldliness and its Transformations: Some More Comments on Louis Dumont," *Religion* 13 (1983): 1–19.

[21] Werblowsky, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity*, p. 85.

more average religiosity, and giving legitimacy to a split between virtuoso and mass religiosity – rightly addressed by Wolfgang Schluchter as a strategy of "relativization" in coping with world-renouncing orientations.[22] In itself, however, this basic double standard is not sufficient to account for the emergence of more specific patterns of interaction between virtuosi and society. No less important, we shall also consider the impact of different conceptions of religious authority and of the religious collective, encouraging differing modes of incorporation of virtuoso elites within a wider religious collective. Reaching for a fuller ideological analysis and going beyond fully explicit doctrinal contents will also necessitate, I submit, locating the orientations just described within the cultural field at large, and examining their relation to other, possibly competing, symbolic and ideological orientations.

This detailed attention to doctrinal contents and related principles of ideological organization is very much in line with Weber's concern with granting religious orientations a large measure of autonomy and a central role in shaping the basic premises and historical dynamics of entire civilizations. It also coincides with recent pleas for historical sociologists to both recognize the analytic autonomy of culture and give serious weight to the analysis of culture's internal structures.[23] Arguing for the impact of religious or ideological orientations as such, it should be emphasized, does not necessarily mean adopting an idealist or simplistic consensual model of the role of religious beliefs in social life. Rather, the ideological and institutional dimensions of virtuoso religion in its interaction with society at large will be treated here as deeply intertwined with each other. Moreover, both (as probably all) religious systems may be shown to contain significant tensions or inner contradictions, and thus the potential for divergent interpretations. It is important to recognize, though, that there were some ideological parameters, however equivocal, and that the ideological game was not entirely open-ended.

The specific path taken by the institutionalization of virtuosity will not be presented, therefore, as a direct result of clear-cut religious–cultural premises, but rather as the result of the interaction between ambiguous or multivocal ideological premises and specific institutional societal struc-

[22] See Schluchter, "Weltflüchtiges Erlösungsstreben," pp. 41 ff.; also idem, *Max Weber's Vision of History*, p. 32.

[23] See, recently, J. A. Goldstone, "Ideology, Cultural Frameworks, and the Process of Revolution," *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): 405–54; C. Calhoun, "Beyond the Problem of Meaning: Robert Wuthnow's Historical Sociology of Culture," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 3 (1992): 419–44; A. Kane, "Cultural Analysis in Historical Sociology: The Analytic and Concrete forms of the Autonomy of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 53 (1990): 53–70. Kane, however (and unlike Goldstone), sees this as more readily feasible with regard to short-span event analysis than in the context of long-range macrosociological interpretations; S. Kalberg, *Max Weber's Comparative-Historical Sociology*, ch. 2.

tures. In other words, the process of institutionalization should not be seen as the direct expression of potentialities present in the ideological–religious system. Rather, the acting out of internal virtualities combined with and/or was accelerated by major trends in the economic, ideological, and political structures of the broader macrosocietal context, as is brought out in the second chapter of each case study.

B. The interaction between monasticism and its institutional context

In both settings, monasticism seems to have been able to sustain itself over extensive periods of time as a sort of "alternative structure" in the sense defined earlier in this chapter, coping with a range of distinctive dilemmas and with the problem of maintaining its virtuoso withdrawal and renunciation at the same time as it evolved a mainfold relationship to society. The analysis of the major institutional characteristics monasticism developed in the process starts with its internal structures. As already suggested, however, institutionalization should be assessed on the basis not only of organizational structures, but also of monasticism's position within, and interaction with, society at large. Moreover, and in contrast to those models that have emphasized the element of segregation in the interaction between monasticism and society, the present study will draw attention to an aspect of that interaction that none of the interpretations already referred to take into account, namely, the development of an elaborate network of symbolic and material exchange, entailing, among other things, a massive stream of donations to monasteries. Although understood as a contribution to the material support of monasteries, donations could converge with other characteristics of the monastic economy in contributing to the corruption of monastic discipline. Lay donations thus may be seen as adding to the many basic dilemmas facing the monastic institution in its interaction with the environment. However, the gift is also important in that it functions, as already suggested, as an important mechanism of solidarity and reciprocity in the long range. Although the gift relationship played a crucial role in the two cases selected for comparison, it can also be shown to have been founded on different ideological premises and to have given rise to different institutional implications. As such, it will constitute a key factor in our analysis of the different pattern of institutionalization of ascetic virtuosity in these two settings.

Monasticism's social position will be analyzed in terms of institutional autonomy (organizational, economic, and social); social involvement and functionalization, that is, the tendency to provide religious and/or social services to the lay environment; political power; and cultural im-

pact, in the limited sense, for the time being, of diffusion of virtuoso ascetic orientations among lay society. It should be stressed that greater autonomy may not mean lesser involvement, but involvement with different characteristics. Similarly, greater involvement does not necessarily mean greater political power or cultural impact, and these various dimensions in monasticism's social position should be carefully kept apart. Analysis of monasticism's social position in these terms should enable us to assess the effectiveness and scope of the segregation between monasticism and society – the dimension we saw emphasized by Shils – as well as the nature of the pattern of exchange between monasticism and society in each case.

Monastic status and power, furthermore, are to be situated in the context of other foci of spiritual and secular authority with which, as Weber rightly perceived, it sometimes cooperated and sometimes clashed. Although the network of exchange between monks and laymen is a crucial aspect of the relation between the monastic sector and society, it is not the only one. The overall position of religious virtuosi was interrelated with the structure of elites (religious and secular) at large, which may help to explain some of the basic differences in the overall position of the virtuoso sector in our two cases.[24] In addition to differences in economic, organizational, and political resources, we must consider differences in the ideological and symbolic resources that the various elites were able to muster. A major dimension of the analysis at this point will be the relative strength of nobility, and kingship in particular, most apt to shape and control the traffic of wealth and prestige in general, and to impinge upon the position of the monastic sector within this traffic. Another major issue is whether monasticism maintained a closer relation to a specific social group or stratum in terms of recruitment, leadership, or patronage. The impact of economic structures will also be considered, especially the effect of economic trends on the gift relationship. The model applied is one of interaction and competition between various types of elites, promoting alternative principles of organizational and symbolic hierarchization, and capitalizing in the process on a variety of contradictory yet mutually intensifying ideological strands extant in the religious–cultural matrix at large. (One of the little-noted effects of the existence of a monastic sector, indeed, was to raise the pitch of the ideological discourse and articulation of other groups and sectors – themselves influencing, at least in part, monastic discourse and organization.)

[24] For an emphasis on the structure of elites and their relation to broader strata from a comparative macrosociological perspective, see in particular S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Political System of Empires* (New York: Free Press, 1963); S. N. Eisenstadt and S. R. Graubard (eds.), *Intellectuals and Traditions* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973).

The bulk of this discussion will show that the interaction between religious–cultural premises and social–structural factors is crucial to the understanding of the dynamics between virtuosi and society in both cases, although it worked in opposite directions: In Theravada Buddhist societies, it helped solidify a dominant pattern of virtuoso–layman relationship into a major axis of social organization; whereas religious–cultural premises and social–structural contextual factors interacted in the medieval Christian setting so as to ultimately defeat its cultural and social importance.

C. The part of virtuoso radicalism

Further counteracting any overly consensual model of religion will be the importance given, in the third chapter of each case study, to the forces of virtuoso radicalism,[25] implying the criticism of a monasticism perceived as declining or corrupted, as betraying its true virtuoso vocation. Virtuoso radicalism, as such, is a source of tension within the monastic sector and a challenge to the specific pattern of institutionalization that came to prevail in each case; as already suggested, it is both a testimony to the virtuoso sector's ideological vitality, and one of the major sources of the innate precariousness of monasticism. The precise character and impact of virtuoso radicalism, moreover, will be shown to differ very much in each case and to exemplify once again, perhaps even exacerbate, the intertwined impact of ideological orientations and institutional factors in shaping the fate of virtuosity in these two civilizations. I shall consider in particular the impact of eremitic radicalism, that is, of that kind of virtuoso radicalism striving at more extreme (if not necessarily totally solitary) forms of withdrawal and disconnection from society. In both cases, this type of eremitic radicalism can be seen, in Turnerian terms, as the best expression of monastic "antistructure" attempting to disentangle itself from the civilizational double bind of interrelated ideological and institutional structures. However, it will be shown to reproduce and even confirm these structures in some crucial ways, confirming also the increasing divergence between the Theravada and Christian cases. Another major form of virtuoso radicalism – much more developed in the Christian than the Buddhist case – would tend to propound alternative forms of collective virtuoso institutions and alternative (sometimes actually enhanced rather than minimized) patterns of interaction with the laity. I shall try to bring out the contrasting role played by these various forms of virtuoso radicalism and the contrasting overall impact of virtuoso radicalism in general upon virtuosi's social position in each

[25] See this chapter, fn. 8.

setting. Virtuoso radicalism may be said to have been a potent factor in the development of the historical pattern of interaction between monasticism and society in both settings, but with an important difference: It contributed to upholding the centrality of the virtuoso–layman relation in the Theravada Buddhist setting, whereas it converged with a number of macrosocietal trends to shake the foundations of this relation and undermine the very principle of a differentiated virtuoso sector in the Christian case.

Stressing the mutually reinforcing and converging impact of religious–cultural premises, patterns of institutionalization and their sociopolitical context, and patterns of virtuoso radicalism, admittedly entails the danger of a tautological, circular and a posteriori functionalistic type of analysis. This is especially true in the case of Theravada Buddhism, where the convergence is also said to have helped maintain and conserve the overall configuration of the virtuoso–society relation (a problem I shall return to in the following chapter). The comparative method should, however, provide a partial palliative; I hope to confirm, in the move from one case to the other, the significance of the variables involved.

As a heuristic device, the Weberian Western-centered bias will be self-consciously inverted in the order of presentation of our two major case studies. I shall begin by delineating a set of phenomena – summed up here in the notion of the virtuoso–layman "syndrome" – that were especially strong and salient in Theravada Buddhist civilization, and only then assess their equivalents in medieval Catholicism, in an attempt to understand what sustained them over centuries in the first case and prevented their full-fledged development in the second. I cannot claim to have totally avoided Western, ethnocentric biases in this way, if only because comparative analysis is in fact a constant back-and-forth process, but I do hope to have at least introduced an alternative set of questions about the issues at hand.

Part II
Virtuosi and society in Theravada Buddhism

3 Ideological groundings: hierarchy and ritualized exchange

The most remarkable feature of Theravada Buddhism, from the perspective of this study, is that its early scriptures already provided both the notion of a community of virtuosi and a specific model of interaction between virtuosi and laymen. As we shall see, the early doctrinal preoccupation with the relation between virtuosi and laity is itself rooted in a very distinctive mode of coexistence, or "economy," of otherworldly and worldly orientations within the canonical corpus, combining an extreme world-negating definition of salvation on the one hand with a sustained concern with the social order as the inevitable and even necessary *context* of this search for salvation on the other.

Theravada Buddhism is known for its conservative concern with the proper preservation and understanding of its canonical texts,[1] and the Pali scriptures did indeed remain a constant source of reference and ideological inspiration throughout the traditional period. Canonical Buddhism, however, is not the only ideological influence to have been at work. Neither did the interpretation of Buddhist doctrines remain static from the time of their early efflorescence in northeast India, through their spread to what became their bastion in Sri Lanka and later diffu-

[1] "Canonical Buddhism" refers to Buddhism as expressed in the texts of the Pali canon. The latter is not historically homogeneous, but was probably codified mainly during the reign of Ashoka (272–232 BC). According to Theravada Buddhism, which claims to be the only true, orthodox Buddhism (the "Doctrine of the Elders"), the canon was established at the three first Buddhist councils, one immediately after the Buddha's death, the second a century later, and the third, under the auspices of Ashoka, in the mid-third century BC, at which point it is believed to have been transmitted, along with commentaries, to Sri Lanka. The canon is said to have been preserved orally up to the first century BC, and to have been "closed," in the sense of being put down into writing, in the second half of the first century BC. It consists of *tripitaka* – three baskets: *Vinaya,* including the rules of discipline; *Sutta,* sermons and discourses by the Buddha and his disciples; *Abhidhamma,* philosophical commentary on the discourses, compiled after the first two, part of it at the third council. Included in the *Suttapitaka* is the popular corpus of *jatakas,* 547 tales of previous existences of the Buddha (in a fifth-century Pali version, believed to be a translation of more ancient Singhalese and Pali versions). The fifth-century systematized commentary by Buddhagosa, *Visudhimagga,* is taken to represent the unified, orthodox interpretation of the canon. For a recent reexamination of the formation of the Pali Canon, see S. Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990): 89–126.

sion throughout Southeast Asia.[2] Understanding the dynamics of the virtuoso–layman relation on the ideological level will thus also require us to consider a number of later ideological developments that, even if innovative and deviating from canonical premises, became part and parcel of Theravada "orthodoxy."

Very broadly, later ideological developments dramatically accentuated the worldly and political facets of the Theravada tradition. This is most manifest starting with the great monastic chronicles of Sri Lanka, where Buddhism first became a central component of national self-consciousness and kingly legitimacy.[3] However, similar processes, partly after the influence of the Sinhalese model, are also later discerned in the other Theravada countries. Despite its doctrinal conservatism, moreover, Theravada Buddhism has displayed an intriguing capacity to coexist with, and even absorb, heterogeneous cultural influences.

What emerges now from the expanding body of modern scholarship, in fact, is not just plain ideological inertia or dogmatic conservatism, but a rather formidable ideological travail that somehow allowed for the selective retention of canonical premises at the same time as it absorbed variegated cultural influences and accommodated new ideological developments. Throughout (and, to some extent, as a result of) this array of complex developments, I submit, some of the basic canonical guidelines for the interaction between virtuosi and laymen (our central focus of interest) can be said to have been retained basically unmodified – while also obstructing the potential impact of other canonical premises.

The worldly facets of otherworldliness

Buddhism views salvation as the release from *samsara,* the cycle of births and rebirths in a life of impermanence and suffering. The basic condition for such release lies in learning to transcend all desire and thus uproot the very source of all suffering. Only through the appropriate

[2] There is actually no secure contemporary evidence on early Buddhism before the time of Emperor Ashoka (third century BC), but only that inferred from texts or other material from later periods.

[3] The *Dipavamsa* and *Mahavamsa* are the two earliest Sinhalese chronicles, written respectively in the fourth and late fifth century. Composed as dynastic chronologies, they are to be read as documents of sacred and even "national" history rather than "objective" historical sources. See B. L. Smith, "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon," in G. Obeyesekere, F. E. Reynolds, and B. L. Smith (eds.), *The Two Wheels of Dhamma* (Chambersburg, Pa.: American Academy of Religion, 1972); H. Bechert, "The Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography: Mahavamsa and Political Thinking," in B. L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima, 1978), pp. 1–12. A third major Sinhalese "chronicle," the *Tupavamsa,* was composed in the thirteenth century.

ascetic discipline and the practice of meditation can one hope to ascend the stages leading to perfection and reach *nirvana* – a state of ultimate enlightenment, utter bliss, and total detachment from mundane fetters.

Given such exacting otherworldly premises, Buddhism may seem to be a religion of the elite only, a monastic creed of little relevance to the vast majority who are unable or unwilling to follow the demanding path to enlightenment. By and large, this is indeed how it has been long perceived by many interpreters, including Weber himself. Nevertheless, as is by now increasingly recognized, many characteristics of Buddhist doctrine also dull the edge of its otherworldliness. First, transcending all desire does not imply a discipline of physical or mental mortification. Rather, the way to salvation is conceived as the Middle Way, avoiding both mortification and self-indulgence. The follower of this way is not to be steeped in suffering, but in equanimity, the result of a true asceticism in both body and spirit. Buddhism also implies a certain worldliness "in the very belief that man is perfectible and that perfection can be attained here and now."[4] Buddhahood itself implies a similar belief: The Buddha is only a man, or at most a "superman," (*mahapurusa*) who has perfected himself through innumerable existences. Moreover, his achievement is not unique but accessible to others as well: There were other Buddhas before him, and there will be others after.[5]

However, it is through the notion of *karma* in particular, and the accompanying idea of merit, that Buddhism makes place for worldly orientations. Progress along the path to salvation, according to the law of karma, is the result of the merit one has accumulated during past and present lives. Yet merit also ensures the betterment of one's condition, whether in the present or in future existence, in what are primarily worldly terms such as wealth, health, and power. Although the accumu-

[4] I. B. Horner, *The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected* (London: William & Norgate, 1936). Also, J. Dunnington, *Arahantship* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1974). Horner, however, suggests that this may already be a corruption of the original notion of arhatship as a state of infinite becoming. See, however, the alternative interpretation by G. D. Bond, "The Development and Elaboration of the Arahant Ideal in the Theravada Buddhist Tradition," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, no. 2 (1985): 227–42. Bond would give historical primacy to the idea of an immediate enlightenment achievable here and now, followed by the development of the idea of enlightenment achievable in a very distant future only, and of a gradual path of perfection stretching over many lifetimes. As Dunnington stresses, nirvana can also be taken to occur at the death of the arhat, and not to be followed by any rebirth (p. 14), weakening the notion of nirvana as attained in a worldly here and now.

[5] On the Buddha's "humanity," see A. Bareau, "The Superhuman Personality of the Buddha and its Symbolism in the Mahaparinirvanasutra of the Dharmaguptaka," in J. M. Kitagawa and C. H. Long (eds.), *Myth and Symbols* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); W. L. King, *A Thousand Lives Away: Buddhism in Contemporary Burma* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), ch. 5.

lation of merit in itself does not lead to nirvana, which is altogether beyond the cycle of rebirths, it cannot be dispensed with even in the pursuit of the highest stages of salvation: An advanced stage of spiritual achievement, just like worldly wealth and power, is an indicator of great amounts of past karma. An analogous ambiguity lies in the all-important notion of *dharma*, usually translated as "law" or "order":

> In the earliest Buddhist traditions accessible to us, [dharma] refers, first and foremost, to the sacred reality which the Buddha had discovered at the point of his Enlightenment. In this context, it is recognized both as the law which regulates and governs the totality of existence and at the same time, as the Truth which enables men to break free from the limitations which existence imposes. [Dharma], in other words, was taken to be the source of both order in the world and salvation from it.[6]

These ambiguous premises are further reflected in canonical Buddhism's equivocal orientation to the social order in general and to kingship in particular.[7] Although early Buddhism (not unlike other salvation religions), entailed no elaborate political theory, it did articulate a contractual, elective theory of the origins of kingship. In this account, the very first king (*Mahasammata*) had been elected by humans to overcome anarchy and enforce law and order in return for a share of the produce of each of his subjects. Beyond these rather pragmatic foundations, moreover, the canonical texts repeatedly propound the ideal of the meritorious king (*dharmaraja*), culminating in the figure of the wheel-rolling universal ruler, the *cakkavatti*, able to bring the world under the aegis of dharma.[8]

The image of the meritorious king, as later developed in the greater chronicles of the fourth and fifth centuries, is far from static and mono-

[6] F. E. Reynolds, "The Two Wheels of Dhamma: A Study of Early Buddhism," in G. Obeyesekere, F. E. Reynolds, and B. L. Smith (eds.), *Two Wheels of Dhamma*, p. 15.

[7] On early Buddhist conceptions of kingship, see esp. B. G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1960):15–22. U. N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1959), ch. 4; R. von Heine-Geldern, *Concepts of State and Kingship*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1957); L. Dumont, "The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 6 (1962): 48–77; E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965), chs. 2, 5, and 7; and Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, chs. 3 and 4.

[8] Stressing their canonical foundation (although not necessarily their actual stature in contemporary political life), it should be emphasized that the loci classici for both the *mahasammata* and *cakkavatti* conceptions are found in the *Digha Nikaya* (The Book of Long Sayings), which is part of the *Sutta-pitaka*, one of the three "baskets" in the Pali canon (see this chapter, fn. 1). For the founding myth of kingship, see the *Agganna Sutta*, (*Digha Nikaya*, ch. 27), in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated by Rhys Davids, pp. 85; for the Cakkavatti figure, see the *Mahasudassana Sutta* (*Digha Nikaya*, ch. 17) and *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* (*Digha Nikaya*, ch. 26).

lithic: compassionate, but also able to handle violence in the name of dharma, and eventually resolving the tension by being both in sequence – a dialectic celebrated in the figure of the great warrior-king Duttha-gamani (r. 161–137 BC).[9] The same tension is also already present in the legendary rendering of Emperor Ashoka's "conversion of heart" after a period of bloody conquests and massacres. Be that as it may, the contrast has been often pointed out between the Buddhist idea of an ethical kingship responsible for the welfare of his people and of the Sangha on the one hand, and the Indian *Kautaliaya-Arthasastra* tradition of pragmatic politics on the other (even if the latter never totally disconnects itself from dharmasutric notions of *rajadharma,* i.e., of the king's ethical duties as upholder of the social order).[10]

Kingship, at any rate, was invested with enough positive value to function as an important metaphor in the very conception of the Buddha himself. Although in some sense facing each other as two basically complementary archetypes, images of the Buddha and of the universal king or world ruler have also tended to nurture each other to the point of coalescence.[11] The same amount of merit is necessary to become a Buddha as to become a *cakkavatti,* a world ruler. Gautama Buddha himself, the latest Buddha, is said to have had the choice between these two possible "careers" – one of the most remarkable illustrations of how the ultimate in world renunciation and the ultimate in worldly involvement are both antithetical and yet intimately connected in Buddhist thought. Buddhas and *cakkavattis* are believed to bear the same thirty-two bodily marks characteristic of the *mahapurusa.* The characterization of kings as *bodhisattvas* – or Buddhas-to-be – is a later development (probably reflecting Mahayana influences),[12] further expressing this propensity to a

[9] A. Greenwald, "The Relic on the Spear: Historiography and the Saga of Dutthagamani," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Sri Lanka,* pp. 13–35.

[10] As Heesterman has pointed out, "Whatever the claims of *artha, dharma* disturbingly keeps hovering over it and even Kautilya's notorious *Arthasastra* does not break with the *dharmasastra* in order to formulate an independent raison d'etat." J. C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 111. The tension between *arthasastra* and *rajadharma,* and the contrast between the Indian and Buddhist conceptions of kingship, are extensively discussed in Tambiah, *World Conqueror,* chs. 3 and 4.

[11] This has been richly analyzed in Reynolds, "Two Wheels of Dhamma." See also Regina T. Clifford, "The Dhammadipa Tradition of Sri Lanka: Three Models within the Sinhales Chronicles," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Sri Lanka,* p. 46; Tambiah, *World Conqueror.*

[12] On the Theravada appropriation and transformation of the bodhisattva figure, see J. C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially pp. 53–62. According to Holt, the characterization of kings as bodhisattvas is fully manifest in Sinhalese materials only from the tenth century on, if already adumbrated as early as the fourth century. Buddhalike status, however, is not an intrinsic

merging of the two images. Such multiplicity of cross-references clearly implies the inclination toward a moral social order infused by and supporting Buddhism. This inclination appears to even border at times upon the outright affirmation of the social order – as long as it is ruled by a proper Buddhist king and in the proper Buddhist way – and goes far in explaining how Buddhism could become the dominant ideology of historical polities.[13]

Nevertheless, this increasing sublimination of kingship does not totally overcome what remains a very basic reticence of the Theravada tradition toward actual kings as at best, in the *Mahavamsa*'s expressive wording, "sweet food mixed with poison."[14] Kings are repeatedly described in the *Vinaya* itself, the book of discipline of the Sangha, as greedy thieves, tyrannical and unpredictable, comparable to the worst calamities.[15] The advisable attitude in the face of such dangerous and unpredictable forces is one of accommodation and opportunistic compliance.[16] The Buddha himself is thought to have modeled the rules of procedure and debate in the Sangha on those of the assemblies in the small republican state communities of ancient India, and seems to have retained a nostalgic inclination for a republican, nonmonarchical form of polity.[17]

Most crucially, kings may come and go, and be better or worse, but never actually supplant the ultimate superiority of the true renouncer. Although taken for granted as part and parcel of an overall understanding of what the "world" is about, they remain of essentially secondary

component of properly Buddhist kingly status (Ashoka, for one, is not known to have referred to himself as a bodhisattva). See Tambiah, *World Conqueror,* p. 73. One also has to take into account the impact of the Indian conception of divine kingship. On the combination of and tension between these various symbolic layers in Burmese kingship, see M. Aung-Thwin, "Divinity, Spirit and Human: Conceptions of Classical Burmese Kingship," in L. Gesick (ed.), *Centers, Symbols and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 45–86.

13 One may see a very real messianic potential in canonical Buddhism around these ideas of the true ruler, or the various Buddhalike and kinglike figures of canonical Buddhism. Other ideological premises, however – such as a perception of time stressing both a cyclical movement and ultimately, Buddhism's decline – would appear, on the contrary, to discourage the actualization of this millenarian potential.

14 *Mahavamsa,* ch. 36, verse 133. See W. Geiger (ed.), *The Mahavamsa* (London: Luzac, 1964), p. 266.

15 See, for example, I. B. Horner, *Book of the Discipline,* part 1, pp. 73–4 (London: Luzac, for the Pali Text Society, 1938). The label "king," moreover is generalized to a broad category of king-dependent officials, thus implying a negative perception of all representatives of the king's government and administration. See ibid., p. 74.

16 R. F. Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism,* pp. 116–17.

17 E. Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1965), ch. 3; Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship,"15.

importance from a soteriological point of view. There is thus a basic tension between those elements "inflating" the king's image as world ruler and Buddhalike, and those confining the king to the status of the most meritorious of all laymen, allowing for a difference of degree only between kings and other laymen on the continuum of accumulated merit. Relatedly, although Buddhism is far from oblivious to its political environment, and deeply aware that its destiny is intertwined with the latter, there seems to be an oscillation between what I choose to call a "maximalist" and a "minimalist" conception of society: between an ideal Buddhist social order supported and ruled by a Buddhalike universal ruler, and a social order as the inevitable, perhaps even necessary, but soteriologically insignificant context of an ascetic path that leads to salvation but away from society – or to use the classic phrase, from "home to homelessness."

The opposition to mortification, the assumption of the perfectibility of man in the here and now, the tension between nirvana and karma, and between renunciation and worldly involvement, as well as the ambiguous attitude to kingship and social order, all indicate that Buddhism entails a certain tolerance, and even affirmation, of worldliness alongside its systematic cultivation of renunciation. Falling somewhere in between Weber's dichotomous otherworldly versus worldly categories, these doctrinal premises do not constitute outright worldly orientations, but rather form the worldly "facets" of Buddhism's truly and essentially otherworldly teachings. Canonical Buddhism does propound a radical detachment from the material and social world, and certainly never sanctifies the latter as the proper locus or vehicle of ultimate salvation; but it also never loses sight of the worldly context in which the search for salvation takes place, if only as the background against which the way to release must define and maintain itself.[18] This distinctive and delicate stance is most manifest, to my mind, in the pains taken to provide a specific model for the relations between virtuoso and layman, a model that was to constitute a crucial link in the development of Buddhism into one of the major historical world religions.

[18] For emphasis on this dialectical necessity within the scriptures of the existence of a lay world and phenomenology – a "conventional truth" – in contradistinction to which the way to salvation – or "ultimate truth" – defines itself, see S. Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 1982) where it is analyzed with regard to the doctrine of *anatta* in particular but also as a more general principle. Cf. p. 152: "Socially and psychologically, it was and is necessary that there be both effective and cognitive selfishness in order that the doctrine of *anatta* can act, or be thought to act, as an agent of spiritual change. For Buddhist thought, the existence of (for example) enthusiatically self-interested merit-making is socially, psychologically and indeed logically necessary as the raw material which is to be shaped by *anatta*."

The virtuoso–layman relation

The built-in tension between karma and nirvana, between striving for a better rebirth and for the escape from the cycle of rebirths, is mitigated, if not solved, in a striking way: The quest for nirvana remains the realm of the "virtuoso," who is able and willing to engage in the path of renunciation and mediation, whereas merit accumulation, of no immediate soteriological relevance, provides "secondary goals" for the others. What is involved here is clearly and unabashedly a matter of spiritual hierarchy: Those who strive for salvation are held to have chosen the nobler and more difficult option, and to be superior to those who do not wish or are not able to do so.

This has led many students of Buddhism to see it as a "monkish" creed in which the laity was largely neglected and debased, or, in Weber's terms, as a "soteriology of the elite" only.[19] As a dramatic index of the disparate treatment of virtuosi and laymen, the five basic recommendations constituting the lay ethic are often contrasted with the elaborate 227 precepts for monks as laid down in the *Patimokkha* section of the *Vinaya*. Laymen, in most general terms, are simply enjoined to abstain from destroying life, stealing, engaging in illicit sexual relations, telling lies, and drinking intoxicating liquors. Succinct as it may seem, however, the lay ethic is definitely part of the scriptural body. Furthermore (especially when contrasted with Brahmanic ritualism), the Buddhist emphasis on intention as the criterion for the karma value of all human actions has major ethical and spiritual significance. In some sense, the five lay precepts – precisely because they are stated in most general terms – may be understood to be quite demanding, depending on their interpretation and scope of application.[20] Most significantly for our own purposes, the monkish and lay ethics are never really disconnected, and have several points of linkage.

First, anyone can become a monk; one can elect to join or leave the Sangha at will. This open and voluntary access to the highest religious status is especially significant when understood in its historical context as forming a sharp contrast with the Brahmanic emphasis on caste mo-

[19] Other phrases used by Weber that point to the same idea are "soteriology of cultivated intellectuals"; "religious technology of wandering and intellectually schooled mendicant monks"; "religious technology of wandering and intellectual schooled monks," etc. *The Religion of India* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), pp. 205–6, 215.

[20] The scope of the five precepts for the laity is, for example, much expanded if one accepts that they were not purely negative but also entail a positive amplification. For example, abstaining from destroying life also implies protecting living beings, etc. See M. Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*. Translated by C. Grangier and S. Collins (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 167.

nopoly and exclusiveness.[21] Second, the precepts for the monks can be seen as a specification and amplification of the basic five injunctions for laymen – and thus as reinforcing rather than contradicting them.[22] This is in tune, more generally, with the way Buddhism perceives the relation among various levels of spiritual achievement, seeing the higher levels as building upon and encompassing the lower ones. Third, there is an intermediate stage between the two sets of precepts – the ten precepts to be observed on *uposatha* days (every half-lunar month) by all laymen or on a more regular basis by older persons. Involving a greater degree of renunciation than the five, they enable the layman to take upon himself, if he so wishes, a discipline closer to that of the monk.

A fourth element linking monk and layman at the doctrinal level is a basic ambiguity in the very definition of the monastic vocation. If Buddhism were indeed totally otherworldly and exclusively concerned with the ascetic's personal quest for salvation through withdrawal from the world, the monk would be exclusively engaged in the quest for nirvana; his contact with the layman would be reduced to the bare minimum. However, another major concern is the maintenance of the teachings themselves: Their correct transmission, and the survival of the monastic community that is the prerequisite for it, demand a certain degree of worldly involvement and interaction with the laity (if only to ensure further recruitment to the Sangha). This tension between the practice of the doctrine and its transmission and preservation was already felt in the councils held in the first century BC.[23] Although the Buddha was reported to have stressed practice, the councils opted for the preservation of his teachings. The basic issue, however, was never conclusively settled. In fact, it intermeshed with another issue: that of "compassion" versus "selfishness" or, more precisely, "unkind indifference" (since the very notion of a self is contestable from a Buddhist perspective). A monk who concentrated exclusively on the quest for nirvana could be deemed to lack in kindness (a cardinal Buddhist virtue) for refusing to help others on their slower way to salvation.

Even Buddhas are not immune to these basic dichotomies and tensions, as witnessed in the distinction between "teaching" Buddhas (deemed superior) and "silent" Buddhas. Bodhisattvas became central figures in

21 This contrast has often been noted. See, for example, R. Thapar, "Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-Culture?" In R. Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1987), pp. 84–5.

22 This point has been fully developed in G. Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Sin and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism," in E. R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in Practical Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 25.

23 See A. Bareau, *Les premiers conciles bouddhiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955); W. Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Colombo: Gunasena, 1956), p. 158.

Mahayana Buddhism, where they are believed to voluntarily delay their Buddhahood in order to help others reach salvation. As noted, the bodhisattva ideal was also integrated into Theravada tradition, mainly through its juxtaposition with the idea of the righteous, benevolent king. On the account, Gautama Buddha himself, when contrasted with bodhisattvas as understood in Mahayana, may appear as relatively less compassionate since he did teach the principles of salvation (after a long period of hesitation) but did not assume any role of direct soteriological intervention.[24] On the other hand, the Buddha is believed to have exhorted his very first disciples "to travel for the good of the many . . . out of compassion for the world . . . teach the Dhamma," and thus to have invested the Sangha with a missionary vocation and with the duty to preach to the laity from the very start.[25] Admittedly, there is place, theoretically, for many possible interpretations of the ways and extents of that "teaching" or "preaching." The concern with preaching to the laity, however, and the attempt to somehow combine it with ascetic withdrawal from the world may in fact distinguish early Buddhism from other contemporary world-renouncing movements more exclusively focused upon the ascetic's personal salvation.[26]

The fifth point of contact – perhaps the most crucial for the historical development of the relation between virtuoso and society – is through the articulation of an elaborate gift relationship between monk and layman. Strikingly, the gift relationship is already present in the account of the Buddha receiving the very first offering from his first two lay disciples just after he had reached enlightenment.[27] Begging and dependency upon laymen's material support was a common feature of the ascetic life in the context of the larger milieu of world-renouncing, wandering mendicants when Buddhism first emerged.[28] However, the mutual dependency of monks and laity through the medium of a gift relationship appears to have received an unprece-

[24] The Theravada ideal of the arhat is indeed criticized by Mahayana as too self-centered, as not having overcome all attachment to the "I." See E. Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 126–7.

[25] See Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life*, p. 132; see also Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism*, p. 114.

[26] See G. Obeyesekere, "Exemplarische Prophetie oder ethisch geleitete Askese? Uberlegungen zur frühbuddhistischen Reform," in Schluchter (ed.), *Max Webers Studie*, pp. 247–74.

[27] *Mahavagga*, First *Khandaka*, 4:3. "We take our refuge, Lord, in the Blessed One and in the Dhamma. . . . May, O Lord, the Blessed one accept from us these rice cakes and lumps of honey, that that may long be to us for a good and a blessing." *Vinaya Texts*, translated by T. W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), p. 82.

[28] S. Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism, 600 BC–100 BC* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trubner, 1924).

dentedly extensive and fastidious ideological elaboration (and regulation) in the Theravada tradition.

Barred by *Vinaya* discipline from providing for their own food and shelter, monks were thrown into a state of dependency on the laity and hence prevented from cutting themselves off from society. This dependency is mutual, since on the laity's side the Sangha is said to form a "field of merit," in the sense that providing monks with material support through gifts (*dana*) represents the most effective (if not the only) way for laymen to reap merit. Ideally, the best gift is the one given with a proper attitude of selflessness and nonattachment, with no expressed regard for the gift's karmic outcome. Moreover, it is not so much what and how much is given, but whether it is given in the proper way and with the proper state of mind that determines the gift's value.[29] Nevertheless, one may also find evidence, in both canonical and paracanonical texts, of a rather detailed system of correspondences between the types of gifts given and the eventual benefits and advantages for the donor.[30]

It is important to emphasize, however, against Weber, that the layman does not "buy" the virtuoso's blessings or magical powers. In theory at least, the idiom is not that of a "commercial" exchange: No goods or services are expected from the monk in return for the gift (least of all "blessings" or "magical powers"). It is the very fact of giving that confers merit upon the layman; it is not the monk who does so. However, *dana* are not analogous to a bestowal of gifts between friends or equals.[31] On the contrary, the transaction involves the donor's acknowledgment of the recipient's superiority, but at the same time as it implies that the layman has some form of vested interest in this superiority and is far from being totally alienated from it.

It must be noted also the *dana* are a far cry from the idea of the "spontaneous" gift. The manner of receiving the gift is carefully coded and extremely significant: The monk confers a favor upon the layman by accepting the gift. He should not express pleasure at its reception or consumption, nor is he supposed to actively prompt any lay giving, or

[29] See, for example, N. A. Falk, "Exemplary Donors of the Pali Tradition," in R. F. Sizemore and D. K. Swearer (eds.), *Ethics, Wealth and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 1990), pp. 125–43. This volume contains many other invaluable contributions to the understanding of *dana* in the Theravada tradition.

[30] See *Dasavatthuppakarana*, edited and translated by J. Ver Eecke (Paris: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1976), pp. 6–15.

[31] Here I am at variance with Michael Ames who, rightly stressing the nonreciprocal nature of *dana* in both doctrine and actuality, and looking for correspondences between types of exchange in the secular and the ritual–religious spheres, sees *dana* as analogous to gifts between equals – as distinct from bribes to superiors and fines to inferiors. See "Ritual Prestations and the Structure of the Sinhalese Pantheon," in M. Nash et al., *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966).

express any preference. What gifts may legitimately be given and accepted is, again, carefully defined and categorized.[32] Monks must accept gifts from all, with no distinction of wealth or status (this last is another revolutionary injunction in light of the many restrictions governing the acceptance of gifts in the Brahmanic tradition). Only as an exceptional measure of reprobation did the *Vinaya* provide the possibility of refusing *dana* by overturning the alms bowl.[33] In time, tension would emerge between two conceptions of *dana,* one implying the duty of giving laymen something in exchange (mainly, the teaching of dharma, *dharmadana,* also conceived as the greatest gift of all), the other emphasizing nonreciprocity. Whatever the theory, monks and laymen are undoubtedly thrown, through the medium of *dana,* into a highly ritualized and necessary interaction.

Giving in general, and giving to the sangha in particular, developed into a major dimension of righteous kingship in the Theravada tradition. It is significant that a king, King Bimbisara, figures as a prominent follower and patron of the Buddha soon after the latter's enlightenment. A suggestive theme, in this regard, is that of the king giving in excess, reaching for such a level of liberality that he squanders his kingdom's resources, and forcing others to put checks upon his generosity.[34] This is forcefully illustrated in the *Jataka* tale of Gautama Buddha's penultimate rebirth as King Vessantara: In this most popular Jataka tale, King Vessantara is banished by his subjects for giving away the auspicious royal elephant, symbol of the kingdom's security and welfare.[35] In a subsequent phase, though, and after having gone through the trial of the highest form of offering, the giving away of his own children, Vessantara is fully reincorporated, his children and kingdom restored, and the *dana* ethic fully reasserted in a mood of triumphant apotheosis. A similar theme appears in relation to Emperor Ashoka at the very end of his life, prevented by his own officers from depleting the kingdom's treasures in a last spell of unbounded generosity.[36] Both stories strongly testify to the saliency of *dana* in the

[32] It is noteworthy that *dana,* fundamentally, bear no intrinsic relation to the utility of the gift for the monks on the receiving side. See S. Z. Aung and Rhys Davids (eds.), *Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse,* translation of the *Kathavathu* from the *Abhidamma-Pitaka* (London: Luzac, 1969), ch. 7, verses 4–6.

[33] *Cullavagga* V, 20:2–4, *The Book of the Discipline,* part 5, pp. 173 ff.

[34] This connection between kingship and excessive giving is richly analyzed, and King Vessantara and Ashoka's paradigms of giving compared, in J. S. Strong, "Rich Man, Poor Man, Bhikkhu, King: Asoka's Great Quinquennial Festival and the Nature of Dana," in Sizemore and Swearer (eds.), *Ethics, Wealth and Salvation,* pp. 107–24.

[35] See L. G. McClung, *The Vessantara Jataka: Paradigm for a Buddhist Utopian Ideal* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 151.

[36] E. Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Ancien* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1958), p. 271; J. Przyluski, *The Legend of Emperor Ashoka in Indian and Chinese Texts* (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadyay, 1967), p. 122.

Theravada tradition and to the central role *dana* came to play in the definition of righteous kingship – incidentally also confirming the latter's oscillation between its "merely" lay status as most prominent among lay donors and its more ambitious Buddhalike dimensions.[37]

Another aspect of canonical Buddhism that plays an important role in preventing a severe polarization between virtuoso and layman is the seemingly paradoxical compatibility between the Buddha's lofty teachings and what is usually viewed as "popular" or even "primitive" beliefs in a pantheon of gods, spirits, and demons, as well as in "animistic" and magical practices.[38] The attitude of the canonical texts toward such beliefs is far from consistent, varying from total rejection to wholesale acceptance.[39] The orthodox position, as understood by many, would seem to accept these beliefs as part of an overall cosmology, while denying them any ultimate soteriological significance: Gods and demons have nothing to do with the quest for nirvana. The situation of the arhat – the true virtuoso, the one who has achieved full enlightenment – in this respect is interesting: In the course of his exceptional mental and spiritual progress, he is also said to attain extraordinary powers as natural by-products of his asceticism and spiritual worth. At the same time, exercise of these powers might hinder the holy man in the attainment of his supreme goal and might also be confused by laymen with vulgar magical practices.[40] At any rate, magical cosmological elements coexist with more strictly soteriological beliefs not only for laymen but for virtuosi as well. There is enough ambiguity in the attitude of the Buddhist canon toward magical beliefs and practices to prevent the issue from becoming a real line of demarcation between virtuosi and laymen. More generally, monks and laymen accepted the same cosmology – where heavens, gods, demons, and kings all had their place. The difference hinged, rather, upon involvement with the forces assumed by that cosmology versus transcending these forces in pursuit of an equally shared soteriological ideal.

Last, the very fact that the Pali canon stipulates meticulous regula-

[37] The king's *mahadana* emerge not only as a magnified but also as a more perilous version of lay *dana*, and thus somewhat akin to the Indian tradition of kings' *dana* to brahmins, by which it may well have been influenced in the first place. See especially D. Shulman, "Kingship and Prestation in South Indian Myth and Epic," *Asian and African Studies* 19 (1985): 93–117.

[38] This refers only to the relation between "high" Buddhism and "lower" magico-animistic orientations within canonical Buddhism. Their relation in Theravada Buddhism as a presently operative cultural system will be returned to later in this chapter.

[39] See J. Masson, *La religion populaire dans le canon bouddhique* (Louvain: Museon, 1942).

[40] See S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit-Cults in North-East Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 48–51.

tions for monks' interaction with laymen is significant in itself and indicates the very real importance of the laity in the overall scheme. Doctrinal Buddhism may be said to be characterized by the existence of a "segregative–connective" arrangement, instituting a clear-cut distinction between virtuoso and layman, but also avoiding disconnection between the two and establishing what forms in fact a sort of necessary, interdependent *face à face.* This basic arrangement entails the enforcement of a double standard – here, a term to be taken as a neutral descriptive device devoid of the pejorative connotations it has often acquired in western axiology.[41] Although unambiguously affirming the superiority of the virtuoso's pursuit of outworldliness and relegating the layman to a lower, and some would say negligible, status, this double standard also provides lay activities with a certain degree of legitimation. The lay world, moreover, however spiritually inferior, is allowed a significant degree of autonomy. Crucially, however, it is never conceived as the locus of salvation, nor is it necessarily expected to model itself after the highest Buddhist ideals. Admittedly, the many points of linkage between the virtuoso and the lay ethics do corroborate Obeyesekere's emphasis on a process of "ethicization," whereby social morality becomes inextricably intertwined with religious morality.[42] Nevertheless, at no point is the principle of renunciation as such expected to govern laymen in worldly affairs, nor is the renouncer himself supposed to be directly involved in the supervision and management of the social order. As a result, the image of the virtuosi emerging from the canonical scriptures is that of a very special type of elite, combining ultimate superiority with a narrowly defined involvement in and lack of control of secular and collective life on the other.

At the risk of being repetitious, it should be emphasized again that the virtuoso's spiritual and social position cannot be understood independently of the presumed existence of a laity, from which he arises and differentiates himself. In fact, the delineation of the opposition and interaction between virtuosi and laymen – which, as has been noted, was probably much less formalized in the Buddha's own time[43] – acquires such importance in the canonical texts that it might seem ultimately no less crucial than the definition of the virtuoso's progress on the way to

[41] Another term, suggested by R. J. Z. Werblowsky and perhaps more neutral from this point of view, is "two-tiered religiosity." See "Modernism and Modernization in Buddhism," in *The Search for Absolute Values in a Changing World,* Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences (San Francisco, 1977), p. 126.

[42] Obeyesekere, "Exemplarische Prophetie," p. 250.

[43] H. Bechert, "Contradictions in Sinhalese Buddhism," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 4 (1973) p. 11; G. Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985): 9–47.

salvation, of which the laity appears to be the natural and necessary audience. The notion of an "audience" happens to accord with the Weberian metaphor of a virtuoso performer (although Weber himself did not at all suggest stretching the metaphor in that specific direction). It is also congruous with Nietzsche's notion of the ascetic's "triumph." As Tambiah notes, renunciation expects to be acclaimed by the world: "It would seem as if the movement set in motion by the Buddha, which attracted the youths of the 'noble families' of his time, was intended to make its point to these same families, the point that the renouncers' life is an exemplary one which had to be respected, admired and supported by the society at large, whose troubles, obsessions and vices it transcended."[44]

The construction of ideological conservatism

Although the virtuoso–layman relation is thus carefully provided for in the canonical scheme, it also entails tensions and contradictions that may well have formed the logical seeds of serious doctrinal divergences. One may argue that on purely doctrinal grounds, the potential for heterodox interpretations was enormous. There is in fact evidence of numerous sects and doctrinal divergences[45] emerging in Buddhism in its first centuries. The formation of a Theravada orthodoxy – in which committing the canon to writing, toward the end of the first century BC, was an important phase – took place in (and perhaps through) contention with heterodox trends that had already surfaced in the very first Buddhist councils.[46] Buddhism did eventually branch out in a variety of directions. The great divide between Theravada and Mahayana, in particular, hinges upon critical differences in the relation of the fully enlightened virtuoso to the rest of mankind, epitomized by the different importance

[44] S. J. Tambiah, "The Renouncer, his Individuality and his Community," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer–Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982), p. 307.

[45] Bareau, for one, counts at least twenty (and perhaps up to thirty) sects and around five hundred points of controversy in Hinayana Buddhism. See A. Bareau, *Les sectes bouddhiques du petit véhicule* (Saigon: Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient, 1955). Some, if only a few, of the five hundred subjects of controversy in Hinayana Buddhism compiled by Bareau do bear directly on the relative position of virtuosi and layman: whether a layman can reach arhatship, whether the Sangha merely receives and/or purifies and/or enjoys the gifts, the nature of the layman, whether he purifies the gift, whether he is impure, etc.

[46] See C. S. Prebish, "A Review of Scholarship on the Buddhist Councils," *Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (1974): 239–54; Bareau, *Les premiers conciles bouddhiques*. The historical factuality of the first two, at least, is not beyond doubt. Within Sri Lanka, the Mahavihara "orthodoxy" had to contend with the heterodox, partly Theravadin, partly Mahayanic, tendencies of the Abhayagiri monastery (founded at the end of the first century BC). See also Collins, "Pali Canon."

accorded the arhat versus the bodhisattva or future Buddha.[47] The latter, as already noted, developed into a figure of major intercessory status in Mahayana Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, by contrast, it is the arhat, devoid of any role of soteriological intercession with regard to the rest of mankind, who is more central to the monastic ideal. The bodhisattva notion itself, in its Theravada version, is rather seen as a teacher and preacher of salvation with no immediate soteriological significance, albeit receiving increasing and more "proximate" relevance through its intertwining with the notion of the benevolent Buddhist king.[48]

Within Theravada Buddhism, however, it is important to note the overall stability in the very conception of salvation (the escape from samsara and attainment of nirvana) and the contrast between a very real potential for heterodoxy or sectarianism on purely doctrinal grounds, on the one hand, and the rather minimal historical realization and institutional expression of that potential, on the other. Most significant for our own purposes, not only did doctrinal divergences remain within the boundaries and under the umbrella of a relatively uniform conception of salvation, of dharma and nirvana, but they did not feed upon, and did not give any special prominence to, those tenets of scriptural Buddhism that might have undermined the dominant conception of the virtuoso and of the relation between virtuoso and layman.[49]

In particular, the rejection of all mediation (be it personal, divine, or institutional) in the search for salvation, and the reliance upon individual striving only – a combination of well-known explosive potential in Christianity – might have stood against the emphasis on the practice of renunciation within the framework of a community endowed with an elaborate code of discipline. The fact that no institutional authority was ever sanctified as such, and the undermining of individuality and hence individual autonomy by the *anatta* doctrine of "nonexistence of the self," probably blunted what could have become a source of very serious tension.

No less pregnant with subversive implications is the possibility of various applications of the notion of a Sangha, and especially its possible signification – considered by Prebish to be the primary one – of a "spiritual elite," an "*ariya sangha*" (the reference here is to those who have

[47] See Conze, *Buddhism*. Awareness of the distinct emphases of Mahayana probably played an important role in the self-perception of Mahavihara "orthodoxy," although Bareau notes that Theravadin scriptures are astonishingly silent in this respect. Bareau, *Les sectes*, introduction and p. 299.

[48] See Sarkysyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds*, ch. 7; see also this chapter, fn. 13.

[49] This doctrinal conservatism of Theravada Buddhism has recently been stressed again in contrast with the greater flexibility and complexity of Mahayana in Collins, *Selfless Persons*, pp. 23–5.

realized one or another of the four classical stages of spiritual progress – usually rendered in English as "stream winner", "once returner", "nonreturner", "perfected saint" – posited apart from common people, *prthagjana*).[50] The fact that (as Prebish emphatically states) membership in the Sangha as an ecclesiastical unit was not deemed coterminous with membership in the arya sangha, and that even a layman could become a member of the arya sangha without joining the conventional monastic group, might have contributed to blurring the distinction between virtuosi and laymen. This undoubtedly reminds us of the Christian idea of a "true" or "invisible" Church – superseding, inter alia, the established institutional distinction between priesthood and laity – that had momentous significance for the history of Christian heterodoxy. It is significant that this idea, though present in the early texts and however capable of undermining the division and dominant pattern of interaction between monks and laymen, never received (to my knowledge) any significant expression in subsequent Theravada Buddhist history.

One theory that has been advanced to explain Theravada's general lack of doctrinal fermentation is its stronger concern with "orthopraxy" than dogmatic orthodoxy, its conviction that salvation depends more on right practice (including mental practice, meditation) than right belief. (In a sense, this concern with proper behavior is in continuity with the Indian ritualism against which Buddhism in many other ways reacted.) Although this might have been expected to give free rein to doctrinal creativity, the argument goes, it combined with a general distrust of free rational inquiry, and facilitated doctrinal stagnation.[51] Although this ritualistic, orthopraxic bend might have played a role, there is also much evidence of Theravada conservatism as actually entailing an active labor of construction of tradition: selecting some doctrinal premises, suppressing the potential impact of others (as already suggested), and last but not least, imposing not only specific doctrinal contents but also a specific ideological structure in its interaction with heterogeneous cultural influences. A key feature of this ideological structure, as we shall now see, is the principle of symbolic hierarchization.

[50] See C. S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskirt Pratimoksa Sutras of the Mahasamghikas and Mulasarvastivadins* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press. 1975), p. 3; the idea of the ariya sangha is seldom commented upon in the literature. See, however, R. I. Heinze, *The Role of the Sangha in Modern Thailand* (Taipei: Chinese Association for Folklore, 1977), pp. 53–62. For a controversial stress on the notion of the arya sangha in the early scriptural corpus, see P. Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Early Buddhism* (Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies in conjunction with Allen & Unwin, 1988), ch. 1.

[51] See Peter A. Jackson, *Buddhadasa: A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1988), ch. 1. Focusing on Thailand, Jackson also gives much weight to the stifling effect of state control upon the Sangha.

The principle of symbolic hierarchization

Approximation to canonical standards of purity and orthodoxy admittedly remained an important point of reference; this is clearly evidenced in the cycle and discourse of "corruption" and "reform" examined in greater detail in the following chapters. Nevertheless, canonical Buddhism did not constitute the only significant ideological influence. To begin with, one has to stress the strengthening of what may be called the "Ashokan" streak in Buddhism – implying royal supervision of the Sangha (Ashoka is believed to have conducted the first reform of the Sangha with backing of the king) as part of the king's role in promoting the material and spiritual welfare of his subjects, and the infusion of Buddhist symbology into state rituals. Whatever the historical accuracy of the Theravada rendering of Ashoka's patronage of the Sangha as depicted in the Pali chronicles, it came to form a powerful archetype that shaped the interaction between later kings and Sangha, and made Buddhism an integral component of kingly legitimacy. This process, moreover, was further enhanced through what appears as an increasingly symbolic upgrading of kingship to Buddhalike stature.

Another crucial and related ideological development is the incorporation of Buddhism into a central dimension of national self-consciousness – a process first manifest in the great monastic chronicles of Sri Lanka, but also evident in the later Burmese and Thai chronicles, and dramatically accentuating the worldly and political facets of the Theravada tradition. No less important, if easily taken for granted, was the pervasiveness of the ideology of merit itself and the development, beginning in the earliest stages, of extended notions of transfer of merit.[52] As will be further explicated in the next chapter, these notions greatly facilitated the incorporation of monkhood into a wider network of mutual relevance and solidarity.

What is important for the moment is simply that these various ideological developments significantly strengthened Buddhism's "worldlier" sides, and evolved into deeply anchored, "valid" Buddhist orientations whatever their actual relation to pristine canonical Buddhism. Significantly, though, this strengthening of the worldlier sides of Buddhism, however extensive, never led to a more formal and encompassing "church like" definition of the religious collective, or to the articulation

[52] On the development of canonically equivocal notions of transfer of merit, see R. F. Gombrich, "Merit Transference in Sinhalese Buddhism," *History of Religions* 11 (1971):203–19; also R. McDermott, "Is there Group Karma in Theravada Buddhism?" *Numen* 23, no. 1 (1985): 67–80; C. F. Keyes, "Merit-Transference in the Karmic Theory of Popular Buddhism," in C. F. Keyes and E. Valentine Daniel (eds.), *Karma: An Anthroplogical Enquiry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 261–86.

of institutional principles of religious authority, within or without the Sangha. Nor did kingship or any worldly social institution ever muster enough ideological autonomy to challenge the classical hierarchy of ultimate values. This is all the more striking in view of the deep intertwining of world-negating and world-affirming premises expressed, as noted, in the canonical images of Buddhahood, kingship, and dharma order.

Hierarchization, in fact, appears to have operated as a major principle in sustaining the relatively peaceful coexistence of heterogenous symbolic orientations. In this specific case, the hierarchization of symbolic layers seems to have worked to isolate the supreme ideal of renunciation, whatever its worldlier "facets," from the lower levels. The availability of lower and worldlier codes did not contest the legitimacy of the higher ones, although it certainly circumscribed the scope of their direct translation into everyday life. On the other hand, the sociocultural centrality of higher Buddhist codes could be maintained only at the cost of allowing alternate, if subordinate, symbolic orientations to thrive alongside them. Thus the very hierarchy that upheld the supremacy of the renunciatory, otherworldly orientations also ensured their segregation from the lower normative levels; enshrined at the very apex of the hierarchy of cultural orientations, the highest Buddhist values could be both revered and kept at bay. An important aspect of the efficacy of this hierarchization (whose significance will be stressed again through comparison with the Christian case) is that no alternative pattern of hierarchization ever coexisted or competed with it.

This may also help us to understand how "high" Buddhism – that is, Buddhism as defined by the Pali canon – has always coexisted rather comfortably with a gamut of "lower," "magico-animistic" beliefs and practices. The ambiguous stance of the canonical texts themselves in this regard has already been noted. The issue here is rather the coexistence of these seemingly divergent orientations within Theravada Buddhism as an operative cultural system – an issue that is a central concern of the sociological and anthropological literature on contemporary Theravada Buddhism.[53] In contemporary settings, the "lower" orientations, what-

[53] For example, M. Spiro in *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971) distinguishes between "nibbanic" (soteriological–normative), "kammatic" (soteriological–nonnormative), and "apotropaic" (nonsoteriological) levels. King, in *A Thousand Lives Away,* distinguishes between "high," "low," and "medium" Buddhism, and going further, between seven cultic layers defined by their distance from the central ideal, nirvana. A general and oft-repeated hypothesis is that of a functional complementarity between doctrinal Buddhism and other, "lower" beliefs, each fulfilling different psychological needs, the former geared to otherworldly and distant goals, the latter catering to worldly and more immediate needs. See for example M. Ames, "Magical-Animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis of the Sinhalese System," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (1964): 21–52; also Obeyesekere,

ever their tension with the "higher" soteriological doctrines, are shown to be widely shared by both monks and laymen, at least in the case of the ordinary "village monks." They also evidently contribute to pull monks, as either practitioners or consumers, in the direction of magic and apotropaic practices, and to invest monkhood and Buddhist rituals themselves with pervasive "magical" overtones.[54] The latter might even actually supersede their original Buddhist significance.[55] Similar processes, in fact, were most probably at work in the traditional period, merging "higher" and "lower" orientations, for example, in the worship of Gautama Buddha's relics – a well-established and important "orthodox" practice that developed just after his death and equally engaged both monks and laymen – or in the monks' ritual chanting of *paritta,* protective verses invested with some form of worldly "magical" efficacy.

Too little is known, historically, concerning this thriving realm of popular beliefs – often treated as an inchoate residual category – and concerning possible changes in its internal structure and relation to "higher" Buddhist orientations in the various countries where the Theravada tradition became predominant.[56] Although these "lower" symbolic orientations appear to bring monks and laymen closer, they would also appear to deflect the interaction between them from its more strictly otherworldly soteriological purposes. The important point, however, is again that the hierarchy of values itself, as described, remained uncontested.

One major reason for this state of affairs may be the development of an elaborate system of cosmological beliefs that themselves furthered the all-

"Theodicy, Sin and Salvation," pp. 7–40. As opposed to this approach, which tends to explain the coexistence of higher and lower cultural–symbolic orientations by stressing their difference and complementarity in function, a number of studies have stressed the blurring of differences between the two types of orientations at the day-to-day motivational level. See, for example, J. Halverson, "Religious and Psychosocial Development in Sinhalese Behavior," *Journal of Asian Studies* 37 (1978): 221–32. Closely related, of course, are the various attempts to apply (and modify) Redfield's distinction between Great and Little Traditions. For a critical survey of that literature, see Terence P. Day, *Great Tradition and Little Tradition in Theravada Buddhist Studies* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1988).

[54] There is much evidence that even purely Buddhist symbols and acts can be apprehended in a magical mode. See, in particular, Tambiah's analysis of the magical power attributed to the recitation of Pali sacred verses, in "The Ideology of Merit and the Social Correlates of Buddhism in a Thai Village," in E. R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in Practical Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 41–121. On the magical aspects of the worship of Buddha himself, see King, *A Thousand Lives Away.*

[55] This has been argued, in particular, by B. J. Terwiel for contemporary Thailand in "A Model for the Study of Thai Buddhism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 35 (1976): 391–403.

[56] For an attempt, or more precisely plea, to confront these difficult issues despite the obvious problem of documentation, see Day, *Great Tradition and Little Tradition.*

embracing principle of a cosmic hierarchy of beings, fully congruent with the ultimate values of canonical Buddhism. In King Lu-Thai's influential fourteenth-century cosmological treatise on the *thraiphum* (the three worlds), for example, the world is divided in three major categories of realms (themselves further subdivided into many further internal categories) distinguished according to their level of detachment from the world of desire and materiality. To this is added a full-blown cosmography with Mount Meru as its central axis, a description of the periodic creation and destruction of the lower cosmic realms, and of the path to the highest goal of final release. In sum, cosmological beliefs contributed to reaffirm a hierarchical arrangement putting gods and spirits in subordinate position, and maintaining "higher," "otherworldly" soteriological Buddhist orientations at the very apex.[57] The result, to use Geertz's terms, is a strong congruence between "ethos" and "worldview," further enforcing the unique "reality" of Buddhism as a religious system providing a sort of overarching umbrella to a rich variety of beliefs and practices. The very same arrangement, moreover, appears to have allowed the recurrent incorporation of new cults and practices as long as they preserved the key reverential attitude to anything directly related to the Buddha and his message.

This does not mean, however, that hierarchization is the only and exhaustive principle of cultural organization, nor that it was always able to ensure a fully peaceful relationship with all heterogeneous cults and practices. It is only with the multiplication of studies into the historical development and local expression of various cults and rituals of the kind initiated by Obeyesekere and Holt[58] that one may hope to reach a fuller and more diversified picture of the pattern of interaction between "high" Buddhism and the various heterogenous cultural orientations that have been thriving in cultural settings where Theravada Buddhism has been traditionally dominant.

Doctrinal orthodoxy and historical continuity

The doctrines and institutions of Theravada Buddhism, however, have not remained unchanged throughout the long history of its diffusion in Southeast Asia. Most obviously, the original outworldliness has been significantly toned down and has undergone a far-reaching process of institutionalization – or even, as often said, "domestication" – the sub-

[57] F. Reynolds and M. Reynolds (trans.) *Three Worlds According to King Ruang* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1978).

[58] G. Obeyesekere, "Gajabahu and the Gajabahu Synchronism: An Inquiry into the Relationship between Myth and History," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Sri Lanka*, pp. 155–76; idem, *The Cult of The Goddess Pattini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Holt, *Buddha in the Crown*.

ject of the next section. It would be absurd to claim that members of these societies, or even of their monastic communities, behaved in full accordance with the canonical principles, or that the course of Buddhism in these societies was devoid of corruption and decadence. Nevertheless, we shall see that the actual relationship between virtuoso and society, as it evolved in Theravada societies, has not radically diverged from the basic segregative–connective arrangement characterizing the canonical model. From that perspective at least, it does seem true, as Charles Keyes has observed more generally, that "the world as lived in by people in the Theravada Buddhist societies of Southeast Asia was also the world as it was expressed in the teachings of their religion."[59]

What may be most striking (at least for a Western mind accustomed to the anticlerical tendencies that have accompanied the Christian Church from its very inception), is that the basic requisite for such an arrangement – the very distinction and hierarchy between virtuosi and laymen, with the double standard therein entailed – was never, or not until very recently,[60] contested or displaced by any alternative formula. Moreover, the ritualized, necessary interconnection of virtuosi and layman was not only enforced but even amplified. Not only did it prove effective at the local face-to-face level, but it also received extensive endorsement and formal institutionalization in the historical relationship between Sangha and king. Most crucially, the gift relationship between Sangha and laity received forceful endorsement and consolidation through the crucial role that material support of the Sangha came to play in the definition of kingly legitimacy, that is, at the very center of political authority in the societies in question.

At the same time, virtuosi's segregation from mundane, secular spheres of activity, and in particular from formal political involvement and the direct exercise of political power, was on the whole preserved. This segregation reinforced the virtuoso's prestige and ultimate superiority while effectively circumscribing his direct impact upon lay matters – thereby reproducing the disconnection between spiritual prestige and political power found in the canonical segregative arrangement. (I shall leave aside for the moment the issue, raised in Chapter 2, of the virtuoso's "power" in other than strictly political terms.)

This congruity between the doctrinal model of the interaction between virtuosi and laymen and its actual historical course does not mean that behavior was always on a par with doctrine, that no changes occurred at the ideological level, or that one may draw a direct, causal link between ideological orientations and actual behavior. Rather, the basic

[59] Keyes, *Golden Peninsula*, p. 93.

[60] See S. E. G. Kemper "Buddhism without Bhikkhus: The Sri Lanka Vinaya Vardena Society," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Sri Lanka*, pp. 212–35.

structure of relations between virtuosi and laymen seems to have been sustained and reproduced to some degree independently of its precise conformity with the canonical model, as long as basically congruous with the latter from the point of view of the segregative–connective arrangement already delineated.

The historically successful maintenance of a hierarchy of values, with the virtuoso's search for otherworldly salvation at its apex, may seem somewhat puzzling given the virtuoso's formal exclusion from access to power in the more ordinary, political sense. (Cultural hegemony, to use Gramscian terms, is more easily expected when combined with political hegemony.) I submit, however, that the virtuoso's symbolic superiority was maintained throughout the centuries, not only through the sheer persuasiveness and "static" impact of otherworldly ideals, but also through the active interaction and mutual reinforcement of a range of ideological and institutional dynamics. The virtuoso–layman relation and the renunciatory, otherworldly ideological hierarchy are to be seen as historically interrelated and mutually reinforcing phenomena. Moreover, certain characteristics of the macrosocietal frameworks in which they unfolded reinforced the resulting congruity between the doctrinal–ideological model and its actual historical embodiment. This congruity among the virtuoso–layman relation, the hierarchy of ideological orientations, and macrosocietal frameworks is based not so much on a rigid, one-to-one correspondence between the various factors, as on the flexibility of the virtuoso–layman relational structure itself and its adaptability to a diversified and unstable environment – the topic of the next chapter.

4 Virtuosity institutionalized: the Sangha in social context

The Sangha's organizational structures

Doctrinal Buddhism may seem to have originally addressed itself to the individual renouncer, emphatically enjoined to rely only on his own efforts in the pursuit of spiritual progress and salvation.[1] The relentless emphasis on transcending family and property ties, on moving from home into homelessness and seeking refuge in none but oneself, "wandering along like the rhinoceros," all seem to point toward an essentially individual, isolated, or even solitary way of life.

Nevertheless, the Buddha never advocated the practice of extreme solitude,[2] and the idea of a Sangha, of a community of ascetics, appears to have been present from the very start, if at first only on a limited basis. The early followers of Gautama Buddha were supposedly enjoined to become wandering mendicants – not an uncommon vocation at the time. At least during the three-month rainy season, however, and following a practice common to other wandering sects as well, *bhikkhus* were supposed to retreat to a common residence. The development of a collective form of asceticism is often traced to this period of restricted mobility, favoring the intensification of communal life and the fulfillment of more lay-oriented duties.[3] Be that as it may, the existence and corporate self-consciousness of a monastic order are already manifest in the *Patimokka,* probably the oldest layer in the *Vinaya* literature, stipulating various categories of offenses to a shared ascetic discipline. In time, the order of monks took on a clearly sedentary and cenobitic complexion, a process reportedly ratified by the Buddha himself. Although the mendicant-eremitic ideal did not totally disappear, the cenobitic-monastic strain clearly became predominant.

This cenobitic trend did not necessarily imply, however, a systematic

[1] For a stress on the utter individuality of the renunciatory option, see injunctions such as: "Be you a refuge to yourself, Betake yourself to no external refuge . . . look not for a refuge to anyone besides yourself," *Mahaparinibbana Sutta,* 2:33. In M. Müller (ed.), *Sacred Books of the East,* vol. 11 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1965), p. 45; or, "The self is lord of self. Who else could be the lord?" *Dhammapada,* 12:160, in M. Müller (ed.), *Sacred Books of the East,* vol. 10, p. 45.

[2] The basic structure imposed on the renouncer's individuality – however conceived – by the very idea of a virtuoso community is analyzed in Tambiah, "Renouncer," pp. 299–319.

[3] On the swift transition to the cenobitic pattern in the early Sangha, see especially Dutt, *Early Buddhist Monachism.*

effort at formal communal organization. To begin with, the Buddha himself is said to have refused to designate a successor and to have enjoined his disciples to let *Vinaya* and dharma alone guide their behavior.[4] Indeed, no transmitted hierarchy was ever sanctified: Whatever hierarchy there was (and still is) in the Sangha pertains, at least ideally, to relations of respect rather than obedience. The teaching and advice of older monks was to be sought – discipleship to an older monk was a requirement, at least during the novitiate – but did not imply any constraining power. In what forms a major contrast with Christian monasticism, no "vow of obedience" ever accompanied the vows of chastity and poverty. Nor was there any commitment to *stabilitas loci,* that is, to remaining in one and the same monastery, preferably for life. One could join or leave the Sangha at will and freely leave one monastery for another.

The most important principle of continuity in the monastic order was the lineage of ordination – *upasampada* – which required the presence of five fully ordained monks to ordain another one. As such the lineage of ordination constituted the minimal requisite, and necessary warrant, of the Sangha's continuity and purity. Beyond this, the Sangha's major form of internal regulation consisted in the observance of the rules of discipline as contained in the *Patimokkha* and expanded in the *Vinaya.* These rules distinguish between eight levels of transgressions, the gravest – *parajika* – entailing immediate expulsion from the order, the others leading either to suspension and/or some form of expiation.[5] Recital of the *Patimokkha,* which, together with the periodical practice of public confession and pardoning of transgressions, became the main feature of the *uposatha* service held at the end of every lunar half-month, and was expected to periodically reinforce both knowledge and practice of the rules. The fact that schism was ranked among the gravest of offenses, moreover, clearly betrays a sharp concern with monastic discipline and unity. Nevertheless, the correct working of such a system relied nearly exclusively on the internalization and voluntary observance of norms. Not surprisingly, normative compliance was not always up to expectations, and the history of the Sangha has been marred by recurrent decay and relaxation of discipline, as well as by an unabated tendency to segmentation.

The absence of strong principles of hierarchical authority was accompanied by resolutely egalitarian features in the Sangha's communal life. Binding decisions were to be made by majority vote of all members.[6]

[4] *Mahaparinibbana Sutta,* 16:108.

[5] The four *parajika* offenses are sexual intercourse; stealing; murder or incitement to suicide; and falsely claiming superior, miraculous powers.

[6] Assessments vary about whether the early Sangha's procedures of communal decision making were "egalitarian" or even "democratic." See, for example,

The order was also supposed to transcend social distinctions and remain open and egalitarian both in its recruitment and it its relation to the laity; in particular, monks were to accept *dana* from all without distinction. Although the Sangha in Thailand and Burma remained true to this principle, recruitment in Sri Lanka began very early to evolve along caste lines.[7] Only members of the highest caste – incidentally, also the largest – could be ordained into the *Syam Nikaya,* the oldest and most influential branch of the Sangha. In all three *nikayas* lower castes were either excluded or grossly underrepresented. Moreover, the succession to the headship of the temple and its property came to be regulated in terms of discipleship. Since pupils tended to be chosen from the teacher's kin group, relations between teacher and pupil became tied to property and family interests.

This penetration of the Sangha by caste principles in Sri Lanka (Burma and Thailand had no caste system) clearly indicates that the order was far from immune to the influence of patterns of social organization and stratification prevalent in wider society.[8] Also significant, in this regard, is the development in Thailand, starting with the end of the Ayutthaya era, of a (state-imposed) system of monastic ranking paralleling secular rankings in the king's service.[9] Nevertheless, the penetration of such external principles of stratification cannot always be equated with, and did not necessarily enhance, the internal organization of the Sangha. In Sri Lanka, in fact, the development of highly

Thapar's conception of Buddhist monasteries as a counterculture of egalitarian sanctuaries in "Renunciation." Others would see them as simply replicating tribal traditions. See de Gokuldas, *Democracy in Early Buddhist Sangha* (Calcutta, n.p., 1955).

7 On Sri Lanka's caste system, milder than India's (the visible manifestations being less developed, with much less cultural diversity between castes, no category of "untouchables," and its distinctions emphasized chiefly in situations involving home, family, and food), see B. Ryan, *Caste in Modern Ceylon: the Sinhalese System in Transition* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953); R. F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon,* (Oxford University Press [Clarendon Press], 1971), ch. 8; K. M. Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society, 1750–1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), part 1.

8 This may hold for Burma and Thailand as well, where the Sangha might be simply under the influence of a different social environment than in Sri Lanka. Of special significance here is Embree's conception of Thai society, in particular, as "loosely structured." This conception, however, has rightly been under attack. See H. D. Evers (ed.), *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969), and idem, "The Buddhist Sangha in Ceylon and Thailand," *Sociologus,* n.s. 28 (1968): 20–35. It is in fact in Thailand that the Sangha eventually developed the highest extent of hierarchization and centralization.

9 See D. K. Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand: Education in the Reign of Chulalongkorn* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 9 ff; Tambiah, *World Conqueror,* chs. 10, 11, and 14.

localized forces of monastic landlordism deeply embedded in caste and kinship posed an obstacle to royal attempts at unification and centralization.[10]

In all three Theravada countries, and despite some significant variations in degree of formal organization, the Sangha typically retained the tendency to a relatively amorphous pattern of organization. This was most evident in the low level of centralization and hierarchization both within and between individual monasteries. The very possibility of moving from one monastery to another may be thought to have played an important role in facilitating the access by members of peripheral and small monastic communities to advanced education in the great monastic centers; it may also have favored the development of broader intermonastic networks. Whatever intermonastic relations did develop, however, appear to have remained essentially informal, and did not sustain a shift to more articulated or centralized forms of organization. The same is largely true of *nikayas,* perhaps best translated as monastic "branches," sharing a common lineage of ordination (although the term has also been used to designate other kinds of subgroupings within the Sangha). Although these may seem in some way the closest equivalent of the Western concept of monastic "order," it is not clear what mechanisms connected various monasteries in one *nikaya,* or whether *nikaya* distinctions had any real application beyond the capital centers.[11]

In all three countries, admittedly, the Sangha did at times attain significant degrees of hierarchization and centralization – trends that achieved their most extensive and continuous deployment in Burma, and also thriving in Sri Lanka between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries especially.[12] Organizational structuring of the Sangha would actually culminate much

[10] See H. Bechert, "Theravada Buddhist Sangha: Some General Observations on Historical and Political Factors in its Development," *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (1970): 769; idem, "The Structure of the Sangha in Burma: A Comparative View," in A. K. Narain (ed.), *Studies in the History of Buddhism* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1980), pp. 32–42.

[11] See Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism,* p. 158. *Nikaya,* however, is also used for a variety of subgroupings within the Sangha. For a useful discussion of the various uses of *nikayas,* see Bechert, "Structure of the Sangha in Burma," pp. 33–4. Bechert prefers to see *nikayas* as *Vinaya* sects – defined as communities of monks who mutuallly acknowledge their ordination and make use of the same redaction of the *Vinaya* texts – and prefers to talk of *nikayas* within the Theravada Sangha as "subsects." See also R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Buddhist Nikayas in Medieval Ceylon," *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* 9 (1966): 55–66.

[12] See Bechert, "Theravada Buddhist Sangha"; idem, "Structure of the Sangha in Burma"; D. E. Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 3–37; S. J. Tambiah, "A Note on the Hierarchical Structure of the Sangha in Thailand," in *Buddhism and the Spirit-Cults in North-East Thailand,* pp. 77–80; H. Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Alfred Melzner, 1966), vol. 2, p. 185.

more recently in Thailand (starting with King Chulalongkorn's Sangha Act of 1902), with the establishment of an elaborate structure fully modeled after, and coinciding with, that of the king's secular administration.[13] As a rule, however, organizational structures in the earlier, traditional era proved to be temporary, crumbling as soon as they were not actively sustained by the secular establishment.[14] Even when they did enjoy external support, these structures did not necessarily imply standardized and effective enforcement at the village level. Mendelson argues that the elaborate textual descriptions of a complex monastic hierarchy in Burma, headed by a *sangharaja* nominated by the king and ruling over the entire order through local "archbishops," "abbots," and a disciplinary council, refer to an ideal picture rather than the real situation. The *sangharaja*, in his view, never formed more than a tenuous bridge between the king and a largely autonomous order, which at the local level might cooperate or not, depending on political circumstances.[15] Similar questions arise concerning the actual operation of formal structures of the Sangha in the Ayutthaya era (1350–1767).[16] As for Sri Lanka, the centralized structures established by Parakramabahu I (1153–86) undoubtedly established an unprecedented extent of formal state control of the Sangha that survived in theory until the fifteenth century; but these structures can hardly have had much reality, even during this period, once the king's initial and successful bid at religious and political centralization was challenged by strong centrifugal reactions or, at times of foreign rule, by invaders, such as after the Magha invasion (1215–36) – when monasteries were plundered and their wealth confiscated.[17]

Centralization and hierarchization, at any rate, always arose at the initia-

[13] The Sangha's administrative matters in Thailand are now entrusted by the state to the Department of Religious Affairs, specifically established for that purpose. See Wyatt, *Politics of Reform in Thailand*, p. 247; Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, ch. 19.

[14] In both Burma and Sri Lanka, significantly, the organizational structures of the Sangha were disrupted by the onset of colonial regimes of separation between state and religion. Only in Sri Lanka can we witness some attempt (although again under the king's sponsorship) to initiate potentially self-regulating organizational structures. See K. Taylor, "The Devolution of Kingship in Twelfth-Century Ceylon;" Bechert, "Structure of the Sangha in Burma."

[15] See E. M. Mendelson, "Buddhism and the Burmese Establishment," *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 17 (1964): 87. See also Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, p. 17. The authority of such "leaders" of the Sangha, moreover, cannot but have been rather limited, since they most probably were not invested with the right to expel or punish any monk, nor make any decision of a binding legal character. See Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life*, p. 155, fn. 8.

[16] See the ambiguous evidence discussed in Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, pp. 179 ff.

[17] See B. L. Smith, "Polonnaruva as a Ceremonial Complex: Sinhalese Cultural Identity and the Dilemmas of Pluralism," in Narain, A. K. ed. *Studies in the History of Buddhism*, pp. 295–320; Taylor, "Devolution of Kingship."

tive of the external political authorities, on whom their enforcement heavily depended. The organizational structures of the Sangha, if at times quite extensive, tended to fluctuate with the vicissitudes of monarchy and state, and were not sustained for long without their active support. Whatever monastic officialdom was appointed by the king had no official guarantee of continuity since, as a rule, the accession of a new king automatically terminated the authority of the hierarchy appointed by his predecessor.[18] Most crucially, neither the monastic hierarchy as such, nor the precise degree of centralization and continuity it implied, were ever perceived as intrinsic requisites of the Sangha's purity and corporate identity.

An important aspect of the general organizational weakness of the Sangha was that it wielded no temporal authority of its own and could not enforce an effective system of sanctions to protect its internal discipline and purity. One major consequence was that the Sangha came to depend on external forces, and especially on the willingness, ability, and even initiative of the political center to ensure its internal cohesion and purity. The role of the king as protector and guardian of the Sangha's adherence to the *Vinaya* was traced back to the historical precedent of Ashoka as depicted in the Pali chronicles and commentaries, and made into the archetype of ideal Buddhist kingship. Monarchs periodically embarked on celebrated "campaigns of purification" of the Sangha, in which a variety of religious, political, and even economic motives seem to have often combined.[19] Although such campaigns theoretically took place on the Sangha's own terms, with its assent and in accordance with the *Vinaya* rules, the boundary between "purification" and interference proved to be a fine one. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the centralizing zeal of King Parakramabahu I, which penetrated into the internal management of the Sangha through the imposition of royal supervision and control of the ordination process, and through the enactment of *katikavata* laws that added to, and at times even deviated from, canonical law, even if theoretically in agreement with dharma and *Vinaya*.[20]

Monastic economy

Similar dependence on the external environment was evinced in the monks' nearly total reliance upon the laity for their material support, with

[18] See J. F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), p. 54.

[19] See Bechert, "Theravada Buddhist Sangha." Also Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, ch. 9.

[20] See N. Ratnapala, *The Katikavatas, Laws of the Buddhist Order of Ceylon from the Twelfth Century to the Eighteenth Century* (Munich: J. Kitzinger, 1971). See also M. Carrithers, *The Forest-Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

the gift relationship, in conformity with the canonical model, playing a central role. Monks were not supposed to farm or handle any money or private property. The *Patimokkha* regulations are quite severe in this respect, forbidding a *bhikkhu* "to dig the earth or have the earth dug,"[21] "receive gold or silver" (the last of the ten precepts taken by novices upon entering the order), "pick up or cause to be picked up or consent to the deposit of gold or silver,"[22] or even "engage in the various kinds of buying and selling."[23] Even when these strict interdictions were transgressed, as they were in a most systematic and permanent manner in Sri Lanka's regime of monastic landlordism, monks usually did not engage in commerce or any kind of sustained economic entrepreneurship.

At the same time, though, the Sangha clearly had tremendous economic implications, if only by receiving a significant share of the population's resources in wealth and manpower through the influx of religious donations. *Dana,* as a result, could become the source of serious tension between Sangha and state. We should note here the structural contradiction (most fully analyzed by Aung-Thwin in the case of Burma)[24] between the role of the king as benefactor and chief donor to the religion on the one hand, but also chief rival of the Sangha over the resources of the kingdom on the other. Monastic ownership of land, in particular, constituted a recurrent source of disputes and legal wrangles between monks and king, monks and laity, or even among monks themselves.[25]

The case of Sri Lanka is especially interesting, since monasteries attained an unparalleled level of economic autonomy – in many ways similar to the Christian situation discussed in the next section. Monastic autonomy, as depicted by Gunawardana,[26] was extensive enough to introduce an element of "feudalism" into the social structure of early medieval Sri Lanka. In this context, autonomy may have been sustained by the fact that monasteries played an important role in the irrigation system until the shift of the political and cultural centers to the "Wet Zone" after the Magha invasion in the thirteenth century.[27] The wealth

[21] *Pakittiya dhamma* 10. *Vinaya Texts,* Part 1, p. 33

[22] *Nissaggiya pakittiya,* 18. *Vinaya Texts,* Part 1, p. 26

[23] *Nissaggiya pakittiya,* 19. See *Vinaya Texts,* p. 26.

[24] Aung-Thwin, "Role of *Sasana* Reform."

[25] See Than Tun, "Religion in Burma, 1000-1300," *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 42, no. 2 (1959): 62.

[26] See R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1979). Sri Lanka is also the more consistently "deviant" case, in that monasteries also derived income from a variety of commercial activities. See ibid., pp. 77–8.

[27] R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, "Irrigation and Hydraulic Society in Medieval Ceylon," *Past and Present* 53 (1971): 3–27. Significantly, although it may not necessarily have led to enhanced monastic autonomy, this also seems to have been a period of general prosperity, enabling a rich surplus in wealth and generous endowments to the Sangha.

of the Sangha, at any rate, combined with the transfer to monastic authorities, around the ninth and tenth centuries, not only of fiscal rights but also of the administrative and judicial authority that the king had traditionally enjoyed over the property of the Sangha. Each *nikaya* employed an extensive bureaucratic network – composed at first perhaps of royal delegates, but increasingly replaced by monastic officials – that coordinated its variegated economic interests. Providing land and/or grain in exchange for various products and services from the laity (such as maintenance or repair work on monastic precincts), the monastery played a "redistributive" role within the economy. This role, however, was not always enacted in a wholly benevolent fashion: For example, monks did not shy from enforcing their property rights and other stipulations by threatening to withhold irrigation water or repossess the land. The Burmese Sangha of the early Pagan and Ava eras seems at some point to have reached a comparable level of economic, if not administrative, autonomy, based in part on hereditary "dedicated" or "slave" manpower. Also important in the Burmese case was the use of lay "liason officers" to deal with the outside world, as well as the direct assignment of certain monks to look after lands and property.[28]

However extensive their holdings, use of gold, and commercial activities (in the management of which all monastic officials were usually seconded by lay agents and overseers), it is crucial that monks in Theravada countries never became directly involved in the creation of capital or actual development of the land. Furthermore, as Carrithers points out, "Even when monks became landlords, as some did very early in Sri Lanka, the actual acquisition and use of goods by landed monks tends to take the same form, that of receiving alms, as among more truly mendicant monks,"[29] thus perpetuating the formal frame of the gift relationship between Sangha and laity.

Finally, whatever economic autonomy was achieved, it was always ultimately threatened and limited by the king's right to confiscate or redistribute the Sangha's wealth as part – or as has been argued, as the major motive – of a legitimate campaign of religious purification.[30] The fate of the Sangha's temporal wealth in times of reformation varied from

[28] Than Tun, "Religion in Burma, 1000–1300," 62.
[29] Carrithers, *Forest-Monks of Sri Lanka*, p. 140.
[30] See the debate over this point between Aung-Thwin, "Role of Sasana Reform" and V. L. Lieberman, "The Political Significance of Religious Wealth in Burmese History: Some Further Thoughts," *Journal of Asian Studies* 39 (1980): 753–69, followed by M. Aung-Thwin, "A Reply to Lieberman," ibid. 40 (1980): 87–90. Both Aung-Thwin and Lieberman would agree, as Lieberman puts it, that "in purifying the Order, successful Burmese rulers were strengthening royal control over scarce human and material resources"; but they differ on the importance of this factor in patterns of political decentralization and recentralization, and of dynastic survival or decline.

case to case. In Sri Lanka, autonomy appears to have been more successfully maintained, and monastic temporal property to have remained better preserved. To some extent, however, this may well be the result of a certain conception of the laity's role in protecting the wealth of the Sangha; the belief that "monastic property belonged to the Buddha himself" and that "he who protects the Buddha's property is even worthier than the one who gave property in the first place,"[31] once again emphasizes some form of monastic dependence on the laity.

The Sangha's social incorporation

The Sangha's incorporation in its social environment is most evident, perhaps, in the incorporation of monkhood (in Burma and Thailand but not Sri Lanka) as a temporary stage in the life cycle of most of the male population, usually applying to youth not yet burdened with the duties of an adult member of the community, or elderly persons whose participation in social life is already on the decline. The incorporation entailed cannot be defined as a classical rite of passage, since there was much fluidity. The precise age at which a young man entered the Sangha and the length of time he spent in it varied greatly. Also, participation was far from universal: Not every boy necessarily joined, and only a minority of the elderly, for whom this remained even more clearly a purely voluntary option.[32] Joining the monkhood for longer periods of time than the average normative requirement was usually a source of increased social prestige and could even be an important channel of upward mobility. The institution of temporary monkhood was supplemented by that of periodic "monachization" of the laity on *uposatha* days, when laymen could observe not five but eight or ten precepts and thus somewhat approximate the life of the monk for at least one day.

This institution of temporary monkhood is a development not provided for in canonical Buddhism, and bears some affinities with the Brahmanical postponement of renunciation to the last stage of the life cycle. Both may be seen as a way to "domesticate" renunciation by

[31] S. Kemper, "The Buddhist Monkhood, the Law, and the State in Colonial Sri Lanka," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1981): 410.

[32] On the status of those *upasaka* who choose, in old age, to observe ten precepts instead of five, see Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Sin and Salvation," p. 109. For a comparison with the Indian model of stages in the Brahmin's life, see R. Thapar, "The Householder and the Renouncer in the Brahmanical and Buddhist Traditions," in T. N. Madan (ed.), *Way of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer: Essays in Honour of Louis Dumont* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982), pp. 273–98. With regard to the connection to kinship, it may be noted that the *Vinaya* advises the *bhikkhu* to assist his parents when needed, and to maintain a close relationship with them. There are also many instances in Theravada literature, however, of a contrary stance on that issue.

incorporating it as a temporary stage in the life cycle. Moreover, a significant consequence of the Theravada institution of temporary monkhood is that laymen could exert normative control on monks because they were themselves closely acquainted with the status and duties of monkhood. Further underlining the rather weak autonomy of the Theravada Sangha vis-à-vis wider society, it is worth noting that entering the monkhood, although theoretically entailing a disconnection from kinship ties, actually remains symbolically intimately associated with it, since it is understood as the major way of giving merit to one's parents, and to one's mother especially.

A further indication of the weak autonomy of Theravada monasticism was its tendency to maintain a close connection with local units and its failure to develop any kind of trans- or supranational organizational framework. This may be associated with Buddhism's tendency to develop into a central element of national identity, expressed in its intertwining with the "founding myths" of the respective kingdoms as recorded in their great historical chronicles.[33] In the case of Sri Lanka, this intimate connection between Buddhism and national identity began, in the *Mahavamsa* account, with the very arrival of Buddhism on the island and was sustained, together with Mahavihara orthodoxy, by geographical insulation. However, it was also manifest in the other Theravada countries, for example in the Burmese conviction of being Buddhism's chosen nation in the ideal state of Jambudipa.[34] This intertwining of Buddhism with national identity and social order was dramatized in elaborate nationwide cults and state rituals – such as the Tooth Relic festival in Sri Lanka – that helped bridge regional differences and cement a broader identity.[35] Still, and somewhat paradoxically, these coun-

[33] See Smith (ed.), *Power in Sri Lanka*, and especially Bechert, "Beginnings of Buddhist Historiography," pp. 1–12; Clifford, "Dhammadipa Tradition of Sri Lanka," pp. 36–47; and B. L. Smith, "The Ideal Social Order as Portrayed in the Chronicles of Ceylon," pp. 48–72. See also F. E. Reynolds and R. T. Clifford, "Sangha, Society and the Struggle for National Integration: Burma and Thailand," F. E. Reynolds and T. M. Ludwig (eds.), *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph M. Kitagawa* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); F. E. Reynolds, "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (1977): 267–82. This tendency became most evident in times of invasion and during modern colonialism in Sri Lanka and Burma. See Smith, *Religion and Politics in Burma*.

[34] M. Aung-Thwin, "'Jambudipa': Classical Burma's Camelot," *Contributions to Asian Studies* 16 (1981): 38–61.

[35] See Reynolds and Clifford, "Sangha, Society"; Reynolds, "Civic Religion and National Community in Thailand." See also Smith's rich analysis of the use of both Buddhist and Indian cultic and symbolic devices in Polannaruva as a "ceremonial center" coping with the challenges of regional diversity, in "Polonnaruva as a Ceremonial Complex," as well as the rich analysis of the Tooth Relic cult in H. L. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State* (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

tries were also well aware of being a part of a wider, supranational Theravada complex. This was very concretely expressed in the reciprocal transfer of *bhikkhus* of pure monastic lineages between Sri Lanka and Burma. It is noteworthy, however, that this broader Theravada consciousness never generated the formation of a supranational center or churchlike framework.

It should be clear by now that the sangha has become very much a part of the wider structure. On a more routine day-to-day level as well, monks have been drawn, sometimes to a very great extent, into interaction with laymen – although again, always within definite limits. Here, we shall be able to use, with caution, the invaluable contribution of contemporary anthropological studies that clearly picture the monastery as a cardinal institution of communal life at the local, village level.

Monastic involvement in local affairs was expressed, above all, by their participation in lay rituals. This participation mainly limited itself to the delivering of sermons, the recitation of Pali sacred verses (*parittas*), and the acceptance of *dana* on various ceremonial and merit-making occasions. Of all the various rites of transition connected to the life cycle, significantly, *bhikkhus* were present only at funerals. Letting themselves be fed by the laity, and thus offering the possibility of merit being transferred from the donors to the dead, their role in mortuary rites, at least in comparison with the kind of active, sacramental intercession associated with Catholic priesthood, remains largely indirect.

In a broader sense, however, the presence of *bhikkhus* at various lay rituals may be rightly said to have constituted the more "priestly" pole of their interaction with the laity, to the extent that it offered laymen the opportunity to improve their soteriological prospects through the ceremonial services (however "passively" and "indirectly" defined) of specialized intermediaries.

In an even looser sense, *bhikkhus* no doubt became invested with a crucial function of mediation between the day-to-day world and the realm of transcendental, otherworldly values. Central to this "mediating" function is the paradox, illuminated by Tambiah, of monks' chanting and preaching in sacred words that proclaim otherworldly ideals (the conquest of worldly desires and the extinguishing of life in nirvana) and yet are also believed to confer worldly blessings and protection from a variety of mundane evils and misfortunes.[36] What may seem as the superimposing of magical orientations and interpretations upon "purely" Buddhist practices[37] thus clearly contributed to invest

[36] See especially Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit-Cults*, chs. 10, 11, and 12; also, Tambiah, "Ideology of Merit."

[37] On the magical aspects of Buddha himself, see King, *A Thousand Lives Away*. See also Terwiel, "Model for the Study of Thai Buddhism."

bhikkhus' ritual performances with more worldly forms of significance with regard to the laity.

In general, however, that monks coexisted with numerous cults of local deities with their own respective "specialists," as well as with brahmins in the context of court rituals, somewhat lessened the possibility of the Sangha taking the burden, as it were, of all mediating, priestlike functions. At a more essential level, it is crucial to remember (especially with regard to any possible analogy to the Christian priesthood) that whatever mediating ritual significance the Sangha acquired remained a historical development with no explicit doctrinal anchoring, and no later, post factum doctrinal elaboration.

Shifting now to more practical aspects of the Sangha's interaction with the laity, it is important to note that monasteries were the keepers and transmitters not only of the Buddhist written tradition, but more broadly, of literacy itself. Up to the recent establishment of nonmonastic schools, local monks were the only ones to provide youth with literacy and other basic skills. Individual monks were also called upon for general advice and counseling, which could vary broadly in nature and scope. In this respect, monks' relative "advantage" as counselers is that they were perceived as "objective" outsiders, as a third party with no personal interests at stake. At its broadest, this advising capacity could address individual as well as communal problems, range from mere advice to therapy, and often include a whole gamut of "magical" and astrological practices not strictly within the frame of reference of "higher" Buddhism.[38] Paradoxically, the widespread belief (actually rooted in canonical doctrine itself) that spiritual progress could be expected to engender extraordinary powers, naturally encouraged the drive to "tap" *bhikkhus* in general, and *bhikkhus* of outstanding holiness in particular, for such supernatural energies. Somewhat lessening the weight of this latter aspect of the monks' interaction with the laity, here again it must be stressed that in all Theravada countries, other "specialists" were available and that Buddhist monks were

[38] The broadest range of services seems to obtain in present-day Thailand, where besides its religious functions, the monastery also serves as a community center, counseling agency, hospital, school, community chest, free hotel, news agency, charity employer, bank (at low or no interest), clock, sports center, morgue, poorhouse, landlord (also at charity rates), home for the aged, reservoir, asylum for the psychotic, music school, and refuge for criminals. See H. J. Kaufman, *Bangkhuad: A Community Study in Thailand* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1960), pp. 113–15. Thailand's government is trying to use monks as local agents in the implementation of its modernization policies. It is too soon to judge the extent to which such a high level of communal involvement can be sustained without undermining the distinction between monk and layman as traditionally defined. See N. Mulder, *Merit, Monks and Motivation* (De Kalb, Ill.: Northern University Press, 1968).

never the only ones to provide magical, "therapeutic," or astrological services.

Fundamentally, the monks' rather extensive involvement in communal life was not without dilemma: Although their communal activities might contribute to their public status, these same activities could also undermine it by compromising the withdrawal and segregation from society on which their spiritual prestige depended. There have always been *bhikkhus* who condemned too great an involvement in lay life. Laymen themselves, though of course interested in the services provided, could not forget that seclusion from laymen was a condition of monks' special spiritual worth, which in turn enhanced the value of whatever services and counseling the monks may have provided. Most of all, segregation of monkhood and laity was the crucial prerequisite for the Sangha's validity as a "field of merit" enabling laymen to accumulate merit by giving *dana*.

Contemporary anthropological studies of traditional village settings would seem to indicate, however, that the virtuoso–layman relation is able to maintain a momentum of its own, not always dependent on the Sangha's actual conformity to the *Vinaya*. Obviously, laymen would not support monks who were blatantly unworthy, and the laity, as already suggested, may be seen as exerting continual normative control upon the monkhood, even if this control did not take as dramatic a form as the kings' "campaigns of purification." Nevertheless, standards of purity and adhesion to what was supposed to be a monk's role appear to be flexible or, more precisely, to comprise an interesting blend of ritualization and flexibility. Renunciation has perhaps been maintained most stringently and consistently in the sphere of sexual abstinence. On the other hand, material deprivation may not have been so essential. Mortification was never propounded as an end in itself – in line with the Buddha's conception of the Middle Way. Ironically, monks, as a rule, probably lived a life of greater comfort than most villagers. In general, they were allowed significant leeway in the interpretation of their role: Standards of knowledge and spiritual achievement were minimal; monks could engage in various occult arts, even if contrary to doctrine; they had freedom of movement (and in fact were encouraged to travel after the end of the rain season); finally, they could vary in the scope of their involvement with the laity and communal affairs. Most important, monks were more often engaged in the accumulation of merit than in the pursuit of nirvana, or to use Spiro's terms, oriented to the "kammatic" rather than "nibbanic" dimensions of Buddhism,[39] without in any way impairing the basic pattern of their relationship with laymen.

[39] Spiro, *Buddhism and Society.*

At the same time, however, monks had to conform to precise rules of appearance and deportment. This conformity to a highly stylized image and etiquette is crucial in the layman's eyes, even overshadowing (within, of course, certain limits) the precise extent to which monks practice the Middle Way.[40] In other words, monks are not now, and most probably were not in the past, consistently required to adhere to the highest values: It was enough if they symbolized them. An essential point was that the cleavage between monks and laymen be maintained.[41] The maintenance of this cleavage both depended upon, and was a necessary condition for, the monks' potency as symbols or renunciation, or "living reminders of the impossible."[42] This symbolic feature was obviously able to persist, at any rate, independently of the Sangha's actual nibbanic achievements. What is involved here is a kind of "objectification" of the Sangha's charisma, perhaps not altogether dissimilar from that associated by Tambiah with the cult of relics,[43] an important facet of its institutionalization in Theravada countries that already emerged in Buddhism at a very early stage. Not unlike relics, the Sangha appears to have operated to some extent as a symbolic – more precisely iconic – reminder of "high" Buddhism, independently, and despite its many other possible worldly usages and meanings for the laity.

The gift relationship

The gift relationship appears to have played a major role in the Sangha's symbolization of renunciation. Although *dana* are officially intended to provide material support to monks striving for salvation, in fact they generally bore no direct relation to the monk's actual needs; there was

[40] At the limit, this allows for the phenomenon of false monks – monks who engage in sinful and corrupt behavior and only pretend to be monks – receiving material support from laymen as long as they are clothed in the yellow robe, symbol of sanctity. Again, however, no layman would keep supporting a monk who is blatantly unworthy, and laymen, on the contrary, prefer to offer their gifts to monks reputed for their higher spiritual standing (even if, doctrinally, the worth of one's gifts is not dependent upon the receiving monk's precise spiritual worth).

[41] A similar conclusion has been reached concerning, specifically, the possible corrupting impact of monastic wealth – considered fully legitimate as long as it does not lead monks to act in ways that would blur the distinction between them and laymen – in Kemper, "Wealth and Reformation in Sinhalese Buddhist Monasticism," in R. F. Sizemore and D. K. Swearer (eds.), *Ethics, Wealth and Salvation*, p. 161.

[42] E. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, (Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 2.

[43] I am extending here to the Sangha itself the notion of reification of charisma as originally developed by Tambiah in his treatment of the trade of amulets in present-day Thailand. See S. J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), ch. 22.

often a surplus of gifts, sometimes reaching staggering proportions. This surplus itself acquired important meaning for the layman. Not only was the extent of his gift bearing an indicator of his "store of merit," it also became an important component in his social status as a form of "conspicuous consumption":[44] The more luxurious his gifts, the more respect he garnered from his fellow villagers. Theoretically, *bhikkhus* were enjoined not to store unconsumed *dana,* but to discard them after seven days. However, the surplus in gifts seems to have acquired additional meaning, for the monk this time, as a form of "conspicuous nonconsumption." This is most evident in the (extreme) case of monastic buildings built for a monk of outstanding saintliness and left uninhabited. The same seems to apply to the accumulation of *dana* in the public alm halls (*dana-sala*) erected in Anuradhapura, where kings deposited the gifts they regularly bestowed on the Sangha.[45] As long as it is not consumed and remains, as it were, "on display," this surplus in gifts actually testifies to the monk's asceticism and spiritual worth. The gift, then, is an important mechanism in sustaining the monk's symbolization of renunciation, an ongoing process in which the layman plays as important a role as the monk. Furthermore, by continually reaffirming both the connection and disconnection between monks and laymen, the gift relationship epitomizes the segregative/connective process as defined earlier at the interactional, microsociological level.

Yet it cannot be overlooked that donations to the Sangha have developed into something not altogether identical to what was implied by the canonical notion of *dana. Dana* theoretically involve what Tambiah has called a double negation of reciprocity:[46] the monk standing as a model of nonreciprocity, not supposed to return anything in exchange for the gift; the layman for his part theoretically expecting nothing from the monk in direct return for his gift, since the merit attached to gift giving does not derive from the monk himself. The latter, ultimately, is not the bestower of merit, but only the occasion for it. In practice, as often observed, this model appears to be readily displaced by a simple pattern of reciprocity whereby gifts are given to monks in reward for their participation in various merit-making ritual occasions and other services, or even in direct (and most uncanonical) exchange for merit itself. As noted, gift giving was also incorporated as an important parameter in the local status system. (This could easily have been transformed into a

[44] At the same time, it has and probably had the indirect effect of diminishing differences of wealth within the community.

[45] See W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Medieval Times,* p. 56. Edited by H. Bechert (Wiesboden: Harrassowitz, 1960).

[46] Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults,* p. 213.

pattern of competitive destruction of wealth in the potlatch style; it is significant that it never did.) Although the actual *dana* relation is thus a far cry from the canonical model of nonreciprocity, it never relinquished the idiom of nonreciprocity that forms an essential rather than merely surface component of the interaction between monk and layman. As Strenski notes, monks regularly reasserted their independence from reciprocity in a number of ways, and the result was "a style of exchange which both avoids the appearance and substance of reciprocity and expresses more durable and inclusive patterns of relationship."[47]

The *dana* relation evolved into a partly "particularized" and partly generalized form of exchange. On the one hand, it would be mainly a face-to-face local transaction, permeated by local kinship networks and interests. Although the gift was given, in theory, to the "Sangha of the four quarters," in practice it was often given to a specific *bhikkhu,* frequently a friend or relative. On the other hand, through its connection to merit-making, it played a crucial role in a complex and expansive economy of merit in which notions of equivocal canonical status – such as the possibility of sharing in others' merit by rejoicing in their merit making, acquiring merit just before death, transferring merit not only to the gods and the dead but also to the living, and so forth – have converted merit into a reified, fluid, and transferable substance.[48] Merit was sometimes acquired for oneself, sometimes transferred to specific others, and also – and more often than not – transferred in an abstract and universalistic fashion "to all living beings."[49]

Furthermore, gift giving was predominantly a public endeavor, open and visible to all, and nurturing the general interest. Not only did it sustain the overall merit economy, it also contributed to the maintainance and enhancement of monasteries, which in many ways became

[47] I. Strenski, "On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the Sangha," *Man* n.s. 18 (1983): 472.

[48] In Keyes's words, "Throughout Buddhist Southeast Asia, although perhaps not to the same extent in Sri Lanka, merit is conceived almost as a substance that can be possessed in variable quantities and that can be translated into this-worldly virtue or power as well as stored up to be used at death to ensure a good rebirth." See Keyes, "Merit-Transference," p. 270; on the development of canonically equivocal notions of transfer of merit, see this volume, Chapter 4, fn. 26. It should be noted that Theravada monkhood never developed the notion of taking upon itself the sins (or "bad karma") of others, whether in exchange for *dana* (as Brahmans did, cf. Thapar, "Householder and the Renouncer," p. 276) or with no reference to gifts, as was conceivable, if not characteristic, of Christian monkhood.

[49] For some typical epigraphic examples, see *Epigraphica Zeylanica,* vol. 4, part 3, pp. 133, 140–1, 145; vol. 4, part 4, p. 169; part 5, p. 260; *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, for the Government of India, 1925), p. 121. See also Schopen, "Transfer of Merit and the Monk-Layman," 33 ff.

the central foci of public life.[50] The munificence of donations of all kinds also played an important role in publicly attesting to the vitality of the *sasana* (the Buddhist religion) as a whole. Most suggestive from this point of view are numerous epigraphical formulations conveying such notions as "delight in causing the religion of the Buddha to shine" or "maintain the religion in splendor."[51] *Dana* could consist in the daily giving of perishable food, but also in the giving of a much more tangible and lasting wealth, ranging from the monk's minor personal possessions allowed (and many not allowed) by the *Vinaya* to the gift of land and slaves, and the building, repair, or adornment of monastic buildings. Although all things, and the *sasana* itself, are subject to the law of decay and impermanence, such tangible, material donations were somehow believed to ensure the *sasana*'s survival throughout the predicted 5,000 years of its existence and until the coming of Maitreya Buddha, when all will attain enlightenment.[52]

A related property of *dana* is the extensive and inclusive scope of its operation, its applicability to all laity, from simplest peasant to king – chief donor and supporter of the Sangha and chief merit maker for whom the Sangha functioned as for all laymen as field of merit. As conveyed in the notion of the king's *mahadana,* gift giving could be extended with little modification from the local, microsociological to the central, macrosocietal level. At this central level, indeed, lavish support of the capital monasteries in particular would come to form a crucial aspect in royal displays of pomp and legitimacy.[53]

Dana constitutes such a central and powerful phenomenon in Theravada Buddhist countries that some have gone as far as seeing in it the source of a basic competition between kings and Sangha over the kingdom's material and human resources – the latter perhaps the more crucial in a part of the world where scarcity in manpower, rather than land, seems to have been the dominant issue – and placing it at the root of such major macropolitical processes as dynastic cycles, religious and military polities, and the recurrent emergence and breakdown of poli-

[50] This was suggested in M. Moerman, "Ban Ping's Temple: The Center of a Loosely Structured Society," in M. Nash (ed.), *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 153. See also A. Brand, "Merit, Hierarchy and Royal Gift-Giving in Traditional Thai Society," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 131 (1975): 111–37.

[51] See, for example, *Epigraphica Birmanica,* vol. 3, part 2, pp. 196–8; vol. 4, part 1, p. 48. Closely related is the wish to "increase in prosperity to the great king."

[52] M. Aung-Thwin, "Prophecies, Omens and Dialogue: Tools of the Trade in Burmese Historiography," in D. K. Wyatt and A. Woodside (eds.), *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southest Asian Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 80–1.

[53] For a rich analysis of this aspect of royal prestations, see Brand, "Merit, Hierarchy and Royal Gift-Giving."

ties.[54] Be that as it may, what strikes me as remarkable is that although the flow of donations could evidently be affected by contextual economic and/or political trends,[55] nothing ever undermined – at least until recently – the basic principle of a gift relationship between monks and laymen.

Sangha, kingship, and political power

The specific mode of incorporation of monks into the social structure, allowing for rather extensive involvement at the same time as maintaining this involvement within bounds – is further reflected in the political domain. Monks undoubtedly became part of the broader political game. To begin with, monastic branches, sects, and even individual monasteries competed among themselves for the patronage of wealthy and powerful laymen, and above all kings, who manipulated them in turn, to some extent, in accordance with their own political ends. That the Sangha could attract not only wealth, but also people evading military service or the burden of heavy duties, could become of the greatest political concern for the king, and a major point of tension between him and the Sangha. However, the Sangha could also represent an important political asset for the ruler by mediating between him and the masses, protecting the people from tyrannical rule but also reconciling them with that rule.[56] Monks might intervene, for example, to prevent capital punishment. Their mediating capacity also comes to the fore in their activities as peace intermediaries or diplomatic emissaries.[57] Not to be dismissed either is the influence acquired by monks who served as tutors and teachers for the king or his family.

Most important, however, monks became a crucial party in the legitimation of kings and an all-important ingredient of capital-city politics. The Sangha, in fact, possessed enormous political clout if only through its close connection with the laity, and inasmuch as it became a crucial point of reference in the definition of the benevolent Buddhist monarchy. Further, in matters of succession, the Sangha represented a force that no prince would wish to antagonize, since kingship depended

[54] M. Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The Origins of Modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985). See, however, Lieberman, "Political Significance of Religious Wealth."

[55] Lieberman, ibid., emphasizes such factors as kingly policies, wars, invasions, but also more structural economic changes such as a shift from landed to cash donations toward the end of the fifteenth century.

[56] See C. Kasetsiri, *The Rise of Ayadhuya: A History of Siam in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 136 ff; Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, pp. 378–82.

[57] See Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 205–7; Cady, *History of Modern Burma*.

upon the recognition of karmic proficiency for its legitimacy and could not rely on merely dynastic, hereditary principles. In general, the Sangha's major motive for political involvement was to oppose usurpers or kings who jeapardized the Sangha's interests and the survival of Buddhism. This did not necessarily imply unanimous or centralized corporate political behavior. Rather than interference, the tactic could be one of "active withdrawal," for example, refusing the king's *dana* or leaving the capital and moving to peripheral monasteries. At such times, monasteries might also provide refuge for the regime's opponents. In tenth-century Sri Lanka, for example, monks left the capital (Tapovana) over a breach of their right of sanctuary, whereupon army and laity rose in protest and forced the king, Udaya III, to ask for forgiveness and have the monks return. This tactic did not always have the same result, however, depending on the issue involved and the monks' popularity.[58]

The relation between Sangha and king, if theoretically one of interdependence and mutual support, was thus never static and free of tensions. Royal power could definitely be either enhanced or limited by the Sangha. This very uncertainty invested the Sangha with a political weight that had to be taken into account. Significantly, however – and in accordance with the doctrine of renunciation and detachment from worldly affairs – the Sangha's political activity never amounted to the autonomous political power wielded by the Catholic Church in Western Europe (omitting for the moment any direct comparison with Christian monasticism). There were numerous exceptions to this attitude of disengagement, but they were usually individual aberrations and were frowned upon by other monks.[59] Although certainly not without political importance, and even if it did try to influence or oppose rulers (especially in matters pertaining to Buddhism itself), the Sangha never vied with kings for authority over worldly and political affairs. Moreover, except for recent developments, it did not try to assert itself as a truly autonomous force in the existing political framework, and even less to propound an alternative form of political structure.

The relation between Sangha and king, for all its tensions, has been often and rightly described as one of interdependence and complementarity. In rare deviation from this pattern, a king might want to be a *bhikkhu* himself, not before his accession or after his abdication (the usual pattern), but while retaining his royal functions – for example, King Lu-Thai in fourteenth-century Sukhodaya – or claim for himself spiritual superiority through inordinate mystical powers – such as King

[58] See Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp. 208, 211.
[59] See, for example, M. Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 53.

Takhsin at the end of the eighteenth century.[60] Another case, evidently unique in the history of Theravada Buddhist countries, is that of a monk bidding for kingship – Chao Phitsanulok, king of Fang (1767–8).[61] These various attempts at conflating renouncer and ruler into one person, however, can be seen as marginal deviations from the dominant pattern of mutual dependence and complementarity between the two.[62]

It would be a mistake, nevertheless, to overestimate the ultimate symmetry of the relationship. First, the interdependence and complementarity are never total, for the simple reason that there are always other partners available. Kingship had cosmological and ideological resources other than Buddhism proper.[63] Of primary importance here were elaborate court rituals, in which brahmins and not monks played the essential role. Another important resource of Indian origin was the *Kautilya* tradition of pragmatic, secular statecraft. There was also the whole range of cosmological orientations, rituals, and corresponding specialists of so-called popular Buddhism, actually shared by all strata of the population, including monks and kings themselves. The elaboration, especially in Burma, of the notion of the king as *devaraja* – or king of the spirits – is a clear indication of the symbolic consolidation of kingship through ideological resources other than "high" Buddhism.[64]

In the final analysis, though, the king was more heavily dependent on the Sangha than vice versa. First, kings always had to consolidate their position in the face of very strong centrifugal forces, something that

[60] See Barbara Watson Andaya, "Statecraft in the Reign of Lu Tai of Sukhodaya (ca. 1347–1374)," in B. L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma* (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima, 1978) pp. 2–19; L. Gesick, "The Rise and Fall of King Taksin: A Drama of Buddhist Kingship," in Gesick (ed.), *Centers, Symbols and Hierarchies: Essays on the Classical States of Southeast Asia* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 87–105; J. Butt, "Thai Kingship and Religious Reform (18th–19th Centuries)," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, pp. 34–51. Whatever the use of Buddhism in the legitimation of kingship and polity, it is important to stress that there could be a source of very real "existential" tension between a king's Buddhist inclinations and the pragmatic necessities of his kingly activities, especially with regard to the use of violence. Kings could also become monks for a short time during their reign. See Kasetsiri, *Rise of Ayudhya*, p. 138.

[61] See R. Lingat, "La double crise de l'église bouddhique au Siam (1767–1851)," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 4 (1958): 402–10. There is also the "border" case of Dhammacetti, a regular monk who became king through a whim of the queen of Pegu (1453–72), who wished to retire in favor of a monk. See N. Ray, *Theravada Buddhism in Burma* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1946) pp. 182 ff.

[62] Confirming this argument in the case of Burma, see J. P. Ferguson, "The Quest for Legitimacy by Burmese Monks and Kings: The Case of the Schwegyin Sect (19th–20th Centuries)," in Smith (ed.), *Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma*, p. 68.

[63] This is stressed, for example, in H. Bechert, "The Sangha as a Factor in the Social Life of Sri Lanka and Burma," in *P. E. P. Deraniyagala Commemoration Volume* (Colombo: University of Ceylon Press, 1980), p. 87.

[64] See Aung-Thwin, "Divinity, Spirit and Human."

could not but increase their concern with the legitimation of central authority. Second, although kingship could rely on brahmanic, and not exclusively Buddhist, sources of legitimation – and even, as Sarkisyanz states it, on a distinctive "Ashokan" lay Buddhist tradition rather than monastic-canonical Buddhism proper[65] – kingship never mustered sufficient symbolic autonomy and strength of its own to displace, let alone rival, the ultimate superiority of the renouncer at the apex of the social and spiritual hierarchy. It is striking that even though kings were gradually invested with exalted, Buddhalike status (*bodhisattva, cakkavatti,* etc.), they always remained laymen, and as such had to bow down to the simplest *bhikkhu.*

Kingship, thus, was in a situation of relative symbolic weakness vis-à-vis the Sangha. The weakness of Southeast Asian kingship, paradoxically combined with the grand conceptions of the king as *cakkavatti, dharmaraja, devaraja,* or bodhisattva,[66] has been noted by many. Geertz's words are apt here: "Sovereignty, like divinity, was both one and many. The landscape . . . throughout Southeast Asia, and over the course of at least fifteen hundred years, was dotted with universal monarchs, each represented . . . as the core and pivot of the universe, yet each quite aware that he was emphatically not alone in such representation."[67] In Tambiah's view, however, Theravada kingship oscillated between strength and weakness, periodically diplaying a stronger deployment and embodiment of the ideal world ruler – the potential for which is intrinsically implied in the Theravada conception of the relation between Buddhism and polity.[68] Even in its "stronger" phases, though, an important aspect of the relative weakness of Theravada kingship was its disconnection from lawmaking and the fact that laws promulgated by one king were automatically abrogated upon the accession of a new king. The role of the first and foremost of kings, Mahasammata, was "to protect his people and to administer justice with equity, not to proclaim law."[69] Even on purely organizational grounds, the Sangha, however

65 Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds.*
66 See this volume, Chapter 3, pp. 60–2.
67 C. Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 125. See also Gesick (ed.), *Centers, Symbols and Hierarchies.*
68 S. J. Tambiah, "A Reformulation of Geertz's Conception of the Theater State," in S. J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 316–38; idem, "The Galactic Polity in Southeast Asia," ibid., pp. 252–86; idem, *World Conqueror.*
69 See R. Lingat, "Evolution of the Conception of Law in Burma and Siam," *Journal of the Siam Society* 38 (1950): 18. Even in Siam, where the practice developed of connecting royal decisions with *dhammasattham* rules, and decisions of kings could thus become permanent rules, this was not because these decisions emanated from kings, but because they were illustrations of the eternal law and partook of its authority.

"amorphous" it may be relative to the Christian *ecclesia*, was often a better organized and efficient institution than the king's state apparatus. There were periods of enhanced centralization – as in the reign of Parakramabahu I in Sri Lanka, or in the Ayutthaya and especially the Chakkri eras in Thailand. Usually, however, the king's administrative apparatus remained rather inefficient, and was largely limited to the extraction of taxes and labor.

From the point of view of the virtuoso–society relation, therefore, it is important to note both continuity and discontinuity between the local and macrosocietal levels. The continuity is definitely striking: The relation between Sangha and laity was characterized at both levels by a ritualized network of segregation and exchange, and by the notion of a division of labor and complementarity between the two – best conveyed in the potent image of the two wheels of dharma, both necessary to the "soteriological machinery of cosmos and society."[70] Nevertheless, the question arises of the extent of Buddhism's ultimate dependence on the existence of a normative Buddhist kingship.[71] The issue here is whether the interaction between Sangha and laity at the village level was not, in some sense, more crucial to the resilience of Sangha and *sasana* than was a true Buddhist kingship. It seems at any rate to have proven more stable than the relation between Sangha and king, and to have rested, ultimately, on the essential self-sufficiency of the village monastery and its local lay audience as a "dharma realm" – less momentous than the "dharma realm" of the capital, but ideologically autonomous and endlessly replicable as the basic Theravada civilizational unit.[72]

[70] Reynolds and Clifford, "Sangha, Society," p. 60. The idea receives ample treatment in G. Obeyesekere, F. Reynolds, and B. L. Smith (eds.), *The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon* (Chambersburg, Pa.: American Academy of Religion, 1972).

[71] The idea of the relatively contingent nature of kingship is articulated in the most extreme fashion by Charles Keyes in his review of Tambiah's *World Conqueror:* "The prediction of Buddhism's status as a world religion on the existence of a monarchy informed by the Dhamma creates a parameter which is not essential; lay Buddhist ethics are not dependent on the existence of a monarchy; a Buddhist monarch is an historical development, not a structural imperative." Keyes, "Structure and History."

I would side with Tambiah's argument that an archconception connecting Buddhism and polity, and Sangha and kingship, is traceable to the earliest stages of Buddhist history; once launched, this interconnection created a number of structural possibilities between which the Theravada social order seems to have oscillated. Within this framework, however, I view Buddhist kingship as being in many important ways "frailer" than the basic cell of village sangha and laity.

[72] See Reynolds and Clifford, "Sangha, Society," especially pp. 73–9. The capital as dharma realm hosts the highest-status adherents of both paths (*dharmmaraja, sangharaja*). However, surrounding satellites did not necessarily accept the capital as their symbolic center. As conveyed in Tambiah's model of the "pulsating galactic polity," traditional Southeast Asian kingdoms oscillated between moments of strength and centralization and times of weakness and decentraliza-

The question remains whether this basic unit itself would have been successfully maintained through the centuries without periodic affirmation of its viability at the macrosocial level. Moreover, it would be hard to understand the cell-like expansion of the Sangha without the expansion of Buddhist kingdoms, or the close collaboration of Sangha and king in establishing centers of learning in the capitals and disseminating the Buddhist message over extended geographical spaces. A suggestive example of this intimate connection between Buddhism and kingdom- or even empire-building, is the close collaboration between King Aniruddha and the monk Shin Arahan in the "founding myth" of Pagan.[73] In general, Buddhism might well have first diffused in mainland Southeast Asia in or near the major political centers, and only later radiated into more peripheral areas – although such an assessment might also be an artifact of the historical and archaeological evidence available.[74] There seems to have obtained, at any rate, a very basic compatibility between village-based Buddhism and the decentralized, cellular character of the administrative–political environment and of the rural village structure, itself a correlate of the center's relative weakness.

Social stratification and economic context

Another important factor in the historical resilience of the village "civilizational unit" and the virtuoso–layman interaction at its core may have been the characteristic weakness of "secondary" aristocratic elites, that, like kings, had little hereditary or "dynastic" continuity. Even in Thailand, where nobility was a matter of royal birth, rank depended above all on the mother's status among the king's wives, and diminished generation by generation until the family dropped back into the untitled commonalty in the fifth generation, unless later marriages had brought new titles or ranks.[75] In Burma, every appointment, down to the humblest village headmanship, was the gift of the king, and lapsed at the end of each reign.[76] In practice, local authority was often hereditary, and many a head-

tion. The primacy of the capital is also limited by the relative autonomy of the village dharma realm already referred to.

73 See Ray, *Theravada Buddhism in Burma*, pp. 98 ff.

74 See C. F. Keyes, "Theravada Buddhism and its Worldly Transformations in Thailand: Reflections on the work of S.J. Tambiah," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1987): 133 ff. Not only are the historical data limited, but they might naturally be expected to survive better in political centers where large resources would be invested in the Sangha as well as in monument building and record keeping.

75 See P. J. Bennet, *Conference under the Tamarind Tree: Three Essays in Burmese History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).

76 On the relative independence of the village unit, the absence of a hereditary aristocracy, and the weak social stratification of Burmese traditional society, see Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, especially pp. 11 ff.

manship remained in the same family for centuries. What is crucial, however, is that "there was no feudal class whose political and landholding privileges enjoyed legal sanction against royal interference."[77] The higher strata's status was mostly based on personal vassalship to the king (apt to change with the next ruler), and on local, clientelistic relations with their own vassals, from whom they were not very different in many respects. Moreover, the power of princely elites were plagued by the same inherent weakness as the power of kingship itself. This is a basic aspect of what Tambiah called the "galactic polity," characterized by "lesser political replicas revolving around the central entity and in perpetual motion of fission and incorporation."[78] Within this framework, aristocratic families sometimes amassed sufficient local power to stand in the way of a "strong" king's centralizing claims, as for example during the reign of Parakramabahu I in Polonnavura Sri Lanka. It is perhaps in medieval Sri Lanka indeed that one may find the closest equivalent to an embryonic stratum of nobility, recruited from a number of powerful and eminent clans mostly from the warrior (*kshatrya*) caste, and enjoying significant privileges and immunities.[79] Despite superficial similarities to the "vertical" relationships of Western feudalism, however, what is strikingly absent from this social structure is the horizontal, translocal, and even transnational class consciousness developed by the aristocracy in medieval Europe.

An important implication of the political and symbolical weakness of the aristocracy – which will be better brought into relief through later comparison with the Christian case – is the absence of networks of allegiance and authority beyond the local kinship and village unit that could have competed with the village Sangha for local resources and loyalty. Perhaps not unrelated, the nearly total absence of competing intellectual–cultural elites or educational institutions undoubtedly helped sustain the overall cultural ascendancy of the Sangha.

Last, the overall agricultural, peasant character of South Asian societies also played its part. Trade was confined to the sea coasts and largely geared, at least up to the eleventh century, to international trade.

For a comparison of Thai and Burmese premodern social structures, see Bennet, *Conference under the Tamarind Tree*, p. 61 ff. See also Lingat, "Law in Burma and Siam," p. 22 especially.

77 See V. B. Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest c. 1580–1760* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 10. Lieberman emphasizes the presence in Tongoo Burma, from the end of the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, of a cyclical pattern stemming from the recurrent crystallization of private power centers that have insufficient sanction in the formal hierarchy. See also G. E. Harvey, *Outline of Burmese History* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1954), pp. 187 ff. Harvey also emphasizes the role of intricate sumptuary laws in preventing the development of autonomous foci of status.

78 Tambiah, "Galactic Polity."

79 See Gunawardana, "Hydraulic Society in Medieval Ceylon," pp. 24 ff.

None of the Theravada kingdoms, but rather Java, Cambodia, and Sumatra, were the dominant commercial forces in the area. The withdrawal of the mainland states of Burma and Thailand from the international trade system in the eleventh and twelfth centuries corresponded to a relative expansion of their own more regional commercial networks, and the Burmese empire in particular did become a focal point of regional commerce at the time.[80] Much of the impulse to the trading activity, however, seems to have been due to the Chinese penetration of the internal commercial networks during this era. Even the expansion of trade in the fourteenth century and the increasing integration of Southeast Asia into the emerging world trade network do not seem to have led to any radical changes in social structure – such as the rise of a merchant class with distinctive social and political aspirations – but rather further intensified, at least for a while, the land-based, wet-rice economy. Whatever the general instability of the region and the existence of discernible changes at the economic level, no wave of extensive socioeconomic change (like the one said to have assisted the emergence of Buddhism and its divorce from Brahmanism), shook the material and political underpinnings of the classical virtuoso–layman relational structure during this long era of "traditional" Theravada Buddhism.[81]

Thus certain basic features of the Theravada sociopolitical environment seem to have played a role in sustaining the basic virtuoso–society relational structure, or at least providing it with a favorable context and facilitating its cultural centrality and resilience. Recurrent periods of political disorder, and major changes and variations in the sociopolitical environment – such as the shift from the "dry" to the "wet" zone in Sri Lanka around the thirteenth century,[82] or the contrast between the more benevolent and flexible structure of the Thai kingdom of Sukhodaya and the more rigid and centralized Khmer-influenced structure of Ayutthaya[83] – obviously affected the relationship between Sangha and political center in a variety of ways. At the same time, however, such macropolitical trends seem to have had little effect on the basic form and definition of the virtuoso–layman relation at the local level, and to have had no repercussions on the doctrinal articulation of this most essential dimension of Theravada tradition.

[80] See K. R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), chs. 1, 2, 7, 8 especially.

[81] Rural culture was also important in providing a primordial imagery (e.g., house, vegetation, river imagery) supporting the "psychological reality" of high Buddhism's intellectual concepts, even when counterintuitive, both relating perhaps to common underlying, unconscious cognitive structures pervasive in Indian culture at large. Collins, *Selfless Persons*, especially pp. 165–77, 218–25.

[82] See K. Indrapala (ed.), *The Collapse of the Rajarata Civilization in Ceylon and the Drift to the Southwest* (Peradinya: University of Ceylon, 1971).

[83] Kasetsiri, *Rise of Ayadhuya*.

5 Virtuoso radicalism: the triumph of a sociological complex

It is evident that the *bhikkhu,* originally enjoined to forsake all ordinary social bonds, eventually became enmeshed in but another network of social relations both within the Sangha and without, in his interaction with lay society. Hermits and wandering mendicants, representing the more asocial pole of the monastic ideal, became a quantitatively negligible phenomenon but did not entirely disappear. The tension between more and less socialized forms of renunciation persisted and even became from very early on (if not always in a uniform fashion) a significant factor in the various splits and divisions undergone by the Sangha in all Theravada countries.

Out of the divergent emphases on "practice" versus "study" already voiced in the first Buddhist councils developed the distinction between two major types of monastic vocations: *ganthadura,* the vocation of books, that is, of studying and teaching (by implication, teaching the laity); and *vipassanadhura,* the vocation of meditation (implying less of a connection to the laity). Another distinction that not necessarily fully coincided with the former was that between *arannavasi,* or *vanavasi* – forest dwellers – and *gamavasi* – dwellers in monasteries in towns and villages. Forest dwellers were not necessarily hermits,[1] but they did live a more secluded life than *gamavasi,* either individually or in groups, devoting most of their time to meditation and keeping their contact with lay life to a minimum.

These categories could designate differences between individual monks as well as between monasteries or entire branches of the Sangha with regard to their emphasis on lay-oriented activities versus meditation. But forest dwellers and town dwellers also came to be recognized as distinct, major branches of the Sangha. In twelfth-century Sri Lanka, under King Parakramabahu I, the division of the Sangha into village and forest monks was made to supersede the older division into three *nikayas* (Mahaviharasin, Abhayagirivasin, and Jetavanavasin). In nineteenth-century Thailand, too, *vipassanadhura* monks formed one of the three formal divisions of the Mahanikaya sect.[2] Forest dwellers, however, al-

[1] "Forest," moreover, would often be taken in a symbolic sense, meaning simply residing at the outer fringe of the settlement. Within the Syam Nikaya in modern Sri Lanka, the Malvatta and Asgirya branches are said to represent respectively the *gamavasi* and *arannavasi* traditions. In fact, Asgiryi monks live in villages and towns no less than Malvatta monks.

[2] See Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft,* vol. 2, p. 185.

ways remained a minority, representing a living criticism, explicit or not, of the dominant majority of monks who opted for greater involvement in lay society.

Virtuoso radicalism and monastic sectarianism

Radical renouncers engaged in the single-minded pursuit of nirvana through meditation, either in total isolation or in forest hermitages, might thus be understood as a marginal group of deviant extremists or even "sectarians," opposing a religious establishment who favored a vocation of teaching and interaction with the lay world.[3] Such assessment, however, needs to be qualified by a better understanding of the nature of sectarianism in the Theravada Buddhist Sangha.

Splits in the Sangha, even when accompanied by arguments about *Vinaya,* were often triggered by entirely ad hoc reasons, such as personal conflicts, regional considerations, or disputes over property and lay patronage. As Kemper notes (albeit addressing himself mainly to the flurry of Sangha divisions in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka – not fully equivalent to processes of segmentation in the earlier, traditional era):[4] "Reform alone never seems to give rise to new *nikayas.* Often differences in monastic practice and argument about *Vinaya* serve to communicate the fact that segmentation has taken place. Sometimes, 'reform' is altogether irrelevant."[5] Moreover, it has been often observed that splits within the Sangha concerned matters of discipline rather than of doctrine. As a result, the seriousness of divisions within the Sangha has been somewhat underestimated, perhaps by implied contrast with Christianity, where sects and other divisions are deemed to usually arise from doctrinal divergences. The absence of a central authority functioning as keeper of dogma and orthodoxy has probably encouraged this line of interpretation.[6]

[3] Suggestive of the potential of deviance that might be attached to the forest option is the historiographic issue concerning the identity of the so-called wayward monks purged out of the Sangha in Burma in the eleventh century and sometimes identified with forest-dwelling monks. See E. M. Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma: A Study of Monastic Sectarianism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 36 and 46–52, for discussion of this issue and of other connections between the forest tradition and sectarianism in Burma.

[4] More generally, indeed, the richest material and analyses on the subject of the Sangha's divisions and sectarianism pertain to the later, "modern" period, in which problems of confrontation with alien rulers and disestablishment of the Sangha played a part in triggering a broad spectrum of dissension.

[5] S. Kemper, "Reform and Segmentation in Monastic Fraternities in Low Country Sri Lanka," *Journal of Asian Studies* 15 (1980): 40.

[6] See Bareau's stress on the absence of this factor already in the very early history of Buddhist sectarianism, in *Les sectes du petit véhicule,* p. 42.

Whatever the nature of the issue involved, though, the intensity of the controversies and of the ensuing hostilities leaves no doubt as to their importance. If branches of the Sangha often differed on what seem to be minor disciplinary matters – the manner of wearing a robe, drinking or not after noon meals, blessing or not after receiving a gift, and so forth – they also differed on matters of more evident importance, such as the handling of money and property, the importance given to meditation, and, in general, the degree of strictness in observing the *Vinaya* rules.[7] In Burma, for example, the distinction between forest dwellers and village dwellers seems to have originated in a thirteenth-century dispute concerning the rules for looking after the fields associated with the monasteries, a dispute upon which three monks are said to have left for the forest.[8]

Distinctions such as those between forest-dwellers and town-dwellers or between *ganthadura* and *vipassanadhura,* to my mind, can hardly be dismissed as merely disciplinary. For that matter, minor practices can be invested with important symbolic significance, and it is perhaps this symbolic meaning rather than the practices themselves that should be taken into account. Gautama Buddha himself is said to have emphasized practice rather than doctrine, and to have dissuaded his disciples from pondering over "metaphysical" issues. In a sense, if a way or method is the central tenet of a religious creed, controversies on matters of discipline have no less gravity than controversies on matters of dogma in a creed that stresses doctrine.

What seems to have conferred importance to what could appear to be mere differences in practice was the degree to which these could be taken to symbolize steadfastness to the original teachings of the Way as expressed in the *Vinaya* and to a distant past of pristine purity in the pursuit of salvation. The man who achieved enlightenment – the arhat – remained the ideal; someone who isolated himself for meditation and self-restraint, only temporarily joining the monastery, was understood to be closer to the ultimate goal. Whatever the actual realization of this ideal, it never totally disappeared as the ultimate yardstick for the evaluation of one's spiritual standing. Anti-institutional or rather a-institutional as it may have been, it also played an active part in the emergence of reformist monasteries, in the relation between these and other branches of the Sangha, and in the interaction between monks and laymen – although in no simple fashion. To say that something is the supreme ideal

[7] There is even disagreement concerning the extensive sectarian movement that beset Buddhism in the second century following Buddha's death. Some see doctrinal matters as bearing sole responsibility for it, others, rules of discipline. See Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline,* p. 27.

[8] See Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma,* p. 47.

does not necessarily mean that there is a consensus of feelings about it, nor that these feelings are monolithic. Some of the complexity involved is conveyed by the element of uncertainty introduced into the basic gift relationship with the emergence of individuals or branches of the Sangha dedicated to a better approximation of the pristine ideal.

The impact of virtuoso radicalism on the gift relationship

Not surprisingly, wealthy and established monasteries resented the appearance of reformist branches, not the least because laymen might prefer to give alms to those they considered truer to the ideal. The evidence, however, seems here to be somewhat contradictory. According to Malalgoda, for example, Silvat Samagama in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka diverted the flow of alms and indeed aroused the jealousy of other monasteries. Writing about an earlier period, though, Malalgoda also mentions that forest monks, although enjoying awe and respect for exemplifying the ultimate Buddhist ideals, did not attract gifts from kings and other laymen – a fact he attributes to their "renouncing of all social ties and their consequent lack of social significance."[9] In contrast, Geiger recounts that *tapassin* – a general term for radical ascetics – and in particular the major group of them, *pamsukulins,* were highly revered and presented with gifts in medieval Sri Lanka.[10] As for more modern times, Obeyesekere remarks that some laymen prefer to give alms to Amarapura monks, believed to lead a more ascetic life, and that hermit monks are so prestigious that, despite their isolation, their fame spreads and laymen pursue them with gifts to the most secluded spots.[11] This phenomenon seems to obtain in Burma as well, where magnificent monasteries stand abandoned, erected for some withdrawn holy man who has no intention of inhabiting them. Studies focusing upon contemporary Thailand, in contrast, have found that the most highly regarded monk is not the recluse dedicated to self-improvement, and reported varying degrees of resentment against monks who withdraw from communal life.[12] This in turn would seem to be partially contradicted by Tambiah's (more recent) report on the renewed "charisma" of forest

[9] Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society,* pp. 19, 60.

[10] Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon,* p. 202.

[11] Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Sin and Salvation," p. 38.

[12] Jane Bunnag, *Buddhist Monk, Buddhist Layman: A Study of Urban Monastic Organization in Central Thailand* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 55; Mulder, *Merit, Monks and Motivation,* p. 41. This, incidentally, is consistent with Pfanner and Ingersoll's finding that Thai monks were more parish-oriented (vs. monastic-oriented) and more involved in village activities than Burmese monks. See D. Pfanner and J. Ingersoll, "Theravada Buddhism and Village Economic Behavior: A Burmese and Thai Comparison," *Journal of Asian Studies* 21 (1962): 341–61.

saints in Thailand, although the forest monks he deals with are also deeply involved in teaching both monks and laity – periodically coming out from seclusion and remoteness for that purpose.[13]

Attitudes toward the more zealous observers of the Way seem thus to vary greatly; whatever systematic pattern might underlie such variance, if any, cannot be assessed for want of a wider range of historical information. There is enough evidence, however, that religious virtuosi in Theravada Buddhist countries can be both revered for their ultra-orthodoxy and shunned for their deviance from what came to be accepted as the more orthodox path of renunciation, represented by monks remaining in closer touch with lay society. The ambivalence toward these radical virtuosi can probably be taken to reflect the reluctance of Buddhist laymen, and monks as well, to be reminded of the gap between them and Buddhism's supreme ideals. As such, it is a token of both their distance from the ideal and their awareness of it. Nonetheless, these radical virtuosi also represent a threat to the modus vivendi worked out between monks and laymen and between the Buddhist ideals and more worldly orientations. The institutionalized, highly socialized model of renunciation, after all, provides laymen with a relatively easy accumulation of merit and participation in the renouncer's pursuit of salvation, without interfering with their worldly activity. In deviating from it, radical virtuosi appear to disavow not only institutionalized renunciation, but also the division of labor that has become essential to the legitimacy and workings of the Theravada social order. More immediately, they also introduce an element of uncertainty in the pattern of exchange between monks and laymen, a break in the gift relationship that forms such an essential axis of what Werblowsky has suggestively called the "magnetic field of Sangha and laity."[14]

The ambivalence toward more radical, withdrawn virtuosi was never transformed, however, into outright and sustained condemnation, and radical virtuosi never came to embody a full-fledged heterodoxy. One can only speculate whether, given a stronger centralization and power of control, the Sangha might have forced them into such a position – as it occasionally did in conjunction with the king in the case of Mahayanist or Jainist tendencies. Furthermore, although radical virtuosi played a part in the emergence of reformist monasteries and sectarian branches of the Sangha, their influence never really overflowed beyond the Sangha into wider society: They never brought any change either in the basic pattern of interaction between Sangha and society or in worldly

[13] Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest.* Tambiah, however, focuses on the eager interest in relics and amulets connected with these new forest saints, and does not explicitly relate to any effect this might have had on lay *dana.*

[14] Werblowsky, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity,* p. 92.

spheres of activity.[15] This could be seen as simply consistent with their tenacious adherence to the ideal of renunciation; yet a number of other factors seem to have played a part in blunting the potential of radical virtuosity as a source of actual dissent and/or religious change. Although an element of uncertainty was indeed introduced into the virtuoso–layman relationship, as suggested, what is crucial for our own purposes is that the basic segregative/interactive arrangement itself was never really challenged. In some cases, in fact, the more withdrawn virtuosi can even be said to have been instrumental in reviving rather than challenging it.

The conservative features of virtuoso radicalism

First, ascetic practices beyond those demanded in the *Vinaya* always retained an ambiguous doctrinal status.[16] Not only did the Buddha oppose systematic mortification, but connotations of schism and heresy were soon attached to the idea of greater ascetic rigor in the canonical precedent of Devadatta, who threatened to split the Sangha by advocating that additional ascetic practices (*duthanga*) and more reclusive living be made obligatory – which the Buddha refused to do.[17] *Duthanga* practices thus ever remained optional. It is not even clear that the way to *arhatship* necessarily passes through such practices, although they do appear in such eminently "orthodox" and influential texts as *Milinda's Questions* and Buddhagosa's *Visuddhimagga*, as an integral part of the mediator's progress.[18] Moreover, the stringency of *duthanga* practices was qualified by degrees of rigor (traditionally three), and by the fact that they were practiced only one or a few at a time.[19]

Second, the distinction between the way of mainstream village monks and the more radical, ascetic, reclusive, meditative way of forest monks did not necessarily crystallize into groupings of monks that are exclu-

[15] I have developed this point in I. F. Silber, "Dissent through Holiness: The Case of the Radical Renouncer in Theravada Buddhist Countries," *Numen* 18 (1981): 163–93.

[16] The ambiguous status of optional *duthanga* practices is also stressed in Carrithers, *Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, p. 64, who thinks that *duthangas* were well established by the fourth or early third century BC, but that their significance and justification was by no means settled until the beginning of the Christian era. The doctrinal status of ascetic practices and, more generally, the institutional position of ascetic-leaning *bhikkhus*, has also been amply discussed in Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest*, pp. 18–19.

[17] *Cullavagga* VII, 3:15, *Vinaya Texts*, part 3, p. 253.

[18] See *Milinda's Questions*, translated by I. B. Horner (London: Luzac, 1964), vol. 2, pp. 201–77; *Visuddhimagga*, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Berkeley: Samshala Publications, 1976), ch. 2.

[19] See Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest*, pp. 33–5.

sively one or the other.[20] Dichotomies such as forest monks versus village monks, and learning versus practice, often overlapped in actuality and did not produce exclusive groupings of monks so much as two kinds of emphases and orientations. Many sects had both branches; indeed any monastic community could have *bhikkhus* who favored one orientation or the other. Moreover, monasteries or branches formed in reaction to the practices of the village mainstream monkhood were usually unable to sustain their ascetic aspirations and soon manifested internal cleavages reproducing the original dichotomies.[21]

Third, forest monkhood was far from anarchic and unstructured. This is most evident in Sri Lanka, where village monks and forest dwellers became equally recognized, official divisions of the Sangha, endowed with the same organizational structure and equally centralized control upon the ordination process. In some cases, as clearly illustrated by the nineteenth-century Burmese Shwegyin sect,[22] forest monkhood actually displayed a tendency to self-structuring and organization superior to that of village monks. In general, most forest monks remained within recognized lines of ordination shared with more lenient branches, of which they were not necessarily adamant critics even if they themselves opted for what they deemed the purer, better way. Those who remained outside any such recognized lineage of ordination may be seen, by implication, as more critical of the more established Sangha. However, it is also worth noting that there is no evidence, in the history of Theravada religious radicalism, for the potentially much more rebellious rejection of the very principle of the *upasampada,* the lineage of ordination as cardinal to monastic purity.[23]

Although it stands out as a type of protest unknown in the traditional era, even the rising of the Amarapura fraternity – challenging the Kandyan monopoly on ordination in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka – is far from entailing a radical deviation from established patterns. The refusal of chief monks in Kandy to grant higher ordination to those monks not of Goyigama caste – a refusal endorsed by the king if clearly contrary to the *Vinaya* – set off a bitter conflict, further amplified through polarization in terms of caste hierarchy and regional origins (low-caste monks from the coastal regions opposing the inland Kandy

20 See Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism,* p. 157; Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma,* p. 46.

21 Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma,* pp. 53, 165.

22 For a detailed account of the Shwegyin sect, see Ferguson, "Quest for Legitimation."

23 Even recent attempts to undermine the differentiation between monks and laymen and give the laity much greater access to meditative practices are not the same as saying that a monk can ordain himself or does not need ordination at all.

Goyigama establishment). The Amarapura protest is unique in the history of monasticism in Sri Lanka in that it did not depend on the king of Kandy to make its reformist activity a success, and stood against a royal decree – the first time the right of secular authorities to regulate the affairs of the order had even been questioned. Yet as Malalgoda notes, it did not involve principled opposition to secular interference, but rather embodied, more simply, "a fraternity of the traditionally disinherited who challenged the right of the establishment, both religious and political, to keep them permanently excluded."[24] Furthermore, although it arose mainly in protest against caste exclusivism, and was indeed more heterogeneous in caste composition, the Amarapura soon underwent a process of segmentation in which caste distinctions reemerged to play an important role.

Fourth, forest monks became closely involved with the political establishment. As Bechert notes, it was usually in the king's interest to side with the stricter sections of the Sangha, precisely because they were more strongly committed to keeping at a distance from political and economic activities.[25] Kings were also interested in maintaining forest monks as a useful instrument in eventual campaigns of purification. On the other hand, kingly promotion of centralization and opposition to segmentation could hamper a fuller development of centrifugal tendencies among forest monkhood. A salient example of this complex relationship is King Parakramabahu's (1153–86) appeal to Mahakassapa, the leading elder of a withdrawn but large forest monastery, to assist him in reforming and unifying the Sangha. As Carrithers points out, this was the first time in Sri Lanka's history that the king's power actually reached within the Sangha to impose centralization and new regulations (some of them implicitly diverging from the *Vinaya*), enforced by "the double stamp of royal authority and forest-dwelling strictness."[26]

It is no less significant that the merging of these two distinct "reforming" impulses, despite the deviations from *Vinaya* regulations, is not explicitly acknowledged as such in the *katikavatas*, or new codices for the Sangha. This is in line with a characteristic tendency of Sinhalese texts, in Carrithers's words, "to present themselves as of a piece with the Vinaya texts," and to introduce "a deep polysemy into the key concep-

[24] Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, p. 102.

[25] Bechert,"EinigeFragen der Religionssoziologie und Struktur des sudasiatischen Buddhismus."

[26] Carrithers, *Forest Monks*, pp. 172–3. One may note that Mahakassapa is believed to have embodied all possible and conflicting aspirations for a monk (p. 174). This is perhaps the closest analogy to Saint Bernard in the Christian setting. The latter, however, is usually presented as a contradictory, paradoxical figure, whereas no stress is placed on any sort of inner contradictions in Mahakassapa's image.

tions of the Sangha and of purity," making it "possible to espouse quite different visions of reform in practically the same words."[27] In the process of close association with kingly reform, in other words, forest monkhood's reforming discourse lost some of its edge, some of its more autonomous and distinctive potential for criticism and dissent.

We should, however, avoid a simplistic association between reforming tendencies and strong kingship, perceiving monkhood as centralized, hierarchical, and reformed under strong kings, and decentralized, unorganized, and decadent under weak kings:[28] A trend to decentralization of the Sangha could also correspond, as happened in Burma, for example, to the urge to form small, self-governed monastic communities away from and in reaction against strong government intervention.[29]

Another important aspect of the role of forest monks in the Theravada social order is their role in colonizing and civilizing the forest frontiers and attracting settlements, thus enlarging the kingdom and strengthening it on the periphery.[30] However, as stressed especially by Tambiah, forest monks played an even more crucial role at the center, when there was need (in times of dissension, wars, epidemics, droughts, rebellions, and so forth) "to recharge and fortify monarchical legitimacy and creative powers by tapping the purity and charisma of the untarnished forest ascetics. Their very distance from everyday mundane affairs, their disinterest in ephemeral gains, and their alleged capacity to act in detachment in the spirit of cosmic love (*metta*), guaranteed their ability to replenish and revitalize the realm, whenever the center could not hold."[31] That this was a recurrent pattern is all the more impressive in light of the fact that there is certainly no doctrinal encouragement for the Sangha to play that type of role, and in light of the fact that the "forest" option, traditionally, precisely implies insisting upon distance from lay society. In other words, radical virtuosi played a crucial part in revitalizing, reestablishing, or even disseminating further the classical pattern, rather than changing or expanding its definition, seeking structurally different arrangements, or even simply reaffirming the renouncers' social and spriritual autonomy.

Perhaps the most important factor blunting any real potential for dissent or innovation on the part of the more "radical" and withdrawn forest monks, I submit, was that they did not necessarily try to escape, but only to minimize their dependence on and interaction with the laity.

27 Ibid., p. 74.
28 See Kemper, "Reform and Segmentation," 28.
29 See Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*.
30 See Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest*, p. 77. This role has also been noted, for example, in thirteenth-century Burma. See Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, p. 47.
31 Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest*.

A significant factor here is the fact that wealth was never understood as corrupting as such, but on the contrary, was seen as the legitimate instrument of lay merit making and a valid recognition of monks' superior spiritual status.[32] Whatever corruption of the monkhood might take place, as forcefully stressed by Kemper in the specific case of Sri Lanka, it was not perceived as resulting from wealth in itself, but from failing discipline in the use of wealth, dangerously blurring the distinction between monks and laymen.[33] At no point did a Christianlike ideal of radical monastic poverty emerge, which might have inspired a radical criticism and potential transformation of the traditional pattern of interaction between monks and laymen.

Even more essentially, forest monks are not known to have ever voiced any principled opposition to the basic cleavage between virtuosi and laymen, or to have envisioned any significant change to the usual pattern of interaction between monks and laymen. This may perhaps help explain why the more radical virtuosi left no distinctive spiritual or ethical impact on the laity. It is striking, as Obeyesekere notes, that divisions in the Sangha, even where they were endemic, "were of greater importance to the monastic world than to the laity: unlike Christian sects and denominations, the several Buddhist fraternities had very little influence on lay religiosity, and hardly affected the cultural unity of Buddhism."[34] Nor did the laity itself ever really contest the legitimacy of the Sangha in its more "domesticated," lay-oriented forms, even when acknowledging, and at times actually displaying, preference for the more withdrawn, purer forms.

Divergent forms of religious radicalism

We must still consider the occasional emergence of a type of holy men who might seem to diverge from the dominant pattern already described. Such holy men are not necessarily ordained *bhikkhus*,[35] but are related to the forest tradition to the extent that they generally display some form of intensified virtuoso asceticism and go through a phase of eremitic withdrawal. They also display, however, a more expansive,

[32] For a rich examination of the Theravada attitude to wealth, see R. F. Sizemore and D. K. Swearer, (eds.) *Ethics, Wealth and Salvation.*

[33] See Kemper, "Wealth and Reformation in Sinhalese Buddhist Monasticism."

[34] Obeyesekere, "Religion and Polity," 629.

[35] *Weikzas*, for example, who are the active leaders of Burmese millenarian groups (*gaings*), are not monks as a rule, even if these groups may include some *bhikkhu* members. See J. P. Ferguson and E. M. Mendelson, "Masters of the Buddhist Occult: The Burmese *Weikzas*," *Contemporary Asian Studies* 16 (1981): 62–80; E. M. Mendelson, "A Messianic Buddhist Association in Upper Burma," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 14 (1961): 560–80.

outreaching type of charisma somehow at variance with what has been seen until now. One may distinguish here, on the basis of a cluster of recent works,[36] three distinct (but sometimes combined) types of holy men: those forming the foci of active magical cults catering to the immediate, personal needs of their followers; those becoming meditation masters, attracting a network of disciples and often spreading the methods and benefits of meditation among the laity; and those related to various types of millenarian formations.

All evidence for this type of holy men is taken from the last two centuries only, however, and thus technically lies beyond the boundaries of the present study. Their emergence seems to have been triggered in some places by conditions – such as economic crises, or local and ethnic protests against the central religious and political establishment – that may have obtained as well in the traditional era, but have formed the typical background of revivalist reactions to the advent of modern colonial rule in many other settings as well. To that extent, and despite the undeniable continuity with past ascetic and popular Buddhistic traditions displayed by this type of charismatic religious figures, one should be cautious in presuming the existence of fully analogous equivalents in traditional Theravada Buddhism.

To some extent, one may find in this type of holy men, and in the militant millenarian movements even more especially, the seeds of a centrifugal religious radicalism that, when combined with popular appeal, might verge on heterodox and political protest – a form of "counterculture or counterstructure to domesticated organized Buddhism."[37] On the whole, however, these trends tend to represent a basically peripheral phenomenon with rather weak staying power. Moreover, even the utopian visions they carried with them were not radically different from those moving the central, traditional vision of an ideal Buddhist polity, focusing as they usually did on the image of an ideal ruler caring for the karmic and/or nibbanic aspirations of his subjects.

Most crucial for our own purposes, millennial Buddhism, again, leaves the traditional virtuoso–layman structure basically untouched. In its militant phase, it might tend to fuse renouncer and ruler (since the ruler-to-be first appears or is announced as an ascetic virtuoso of extraordinary powers), which in the more common state of things are neatly separated. Nevertheless, as Tambiah stresses, and as is amply developed in Chapter 3, this convergence at the apex of the principles of world

[36] Carrithers, *Forest Monks of Sri Lanka;* C. Keyes, "Millenialism, Theravada Buddhism and Thai Society," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (1976): 283–303; K. Malalgoda, "Millenialism in Relation to Buddhism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 12 (1970): 424–41; Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest;* Ferguson and Mendelson, "Masters of the Buddhist Occult."

[37] Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest,* p. 319.

renunciation and world ruling is already a characteristic of the interpenetrating canonical perceptions of Buddha and kingship, at least at the level of images and metaphors.[38] Moreover, such fusion of the otherworldly and worldly principles never spread to lower levels of the social and spiritual ladder,[39] to the average layman and monk, whose duties and definitions were left untouched.

In sum, the element of protest existing in early Buddhism (reacting in particular against Brahmanic ritualism and divine dependence) did not have significant historical ramifications in the form of protest movements or revolutionary orientations. Neither did the significant antistructural connotations attached in Buddhism, as in all Indian religions, to the notion of the forest – the symbol of chaos against the known order of settled society[40] – become a lever for actual dissent and/or change. This relative absence of antistructural trends of dissent may be viewed by some as a sign of stagnation, of an inability to transcend established forms of social order. I prefer, however, to interpret it as the result of an exceptionally successful "harnessing" of chaos to settled order, of monastery to village and forest to capital, through what formed a most resilient, ubiquitous, and flexible mechanism, the virtuoso–layman relational structure.

[38] Ibid., p. 320.

[39] Swearer's study of the "layman extraordinaire" in northern Thailand offers fascinating corroboration of this careful disconnection between the lay and monkish roles as they coexist in individuals with outstanding credentials in both roles: Although forming a type of lay religious leadership, their function does not go beyond providing proper mediation in the various traditional forms of interaction between monkhood and laity. See D. K. Swearer, "The Role of the Layman Extraordinaire in Northern Thai Buddhism," *Journal of the Siam Society* 64 (1976): 151–68.

[40] See Thapar, "Householder and the Renouncer," p. 190. In Thapar's view, "interwoven with the notion of exile and of going out was that of creating or starting a new order."

Part III
Virtuosi and society in medieval Catholicism

6 Ideological groundings: plurality and conditional exchange

When we examine the ideological premises of virtuosity and of the virtuoso–society relation in Western Christianity, the overriding fact, in contrast to Theravada Buddhism, is how ambiguous the doctrinal status of monasticism originally was. Undeniably, the Gospels include both a powerful world-rejecting strand and very strong "virtuoso orientations," that is, orientations encouraging the emergence of religious rigorism and perfectionism. However, neither monasticism itself nor a definite, specific pattern of interaction with the laity enjoyed unequivocal doctrinal anchoring. Much of the ambiguity in the theological status of monasticism may be traced to a Christian mode of managing the tension between otherworldly and worldly orientations very different from that characteristic of Theravada Buddhism. As we shall see, in fact, Christianity may even be said to pose serious obstacles to the type of virtuoso–society relation found in Theravada Buddhism.

Notwithstanding the doctrinal ambiguities and obstacles, monastic life did come to represent the foremost ideal and the surest way to salvation for many Christians. The relationship between virtuosi and the rest of the Church gradually received ideological articulation. Underpinning this ideological incorporation of monasticism, however, was a conception of the Christian collective, and of religious authority, that has no equivalent in canonical Buddhism and can even be said to go against its grain.

Doctrinal open-endedness

Christian monasticism made its first appearance in Egypt and Palestine toward the end of the third century, and is thought to have emerged partly as a continuation of the spirit of martyrdom fostered by Roman persecution and partly in protest of the Church's increasing involvement with the world and relaxation of spiritual standards, both drastically accelerated following Constantine's establishment of Christianity in 313.[1] The emergence of monasticism, however, cannot be understood

[1] See H. B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal* (Boston: Beacon, 1962), pp. 6–11 for a stress (by a Methodist historian) on the element of protest at the origin of monasticism. This is in contrast with the stress on continuity with the early Church in, for example, C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Longman Group, 1984).

independently of preceding developments through which a total sexual renunciation (in itself not necessarily enacted in a monastic framework) gradually became a widely acclaimed feature of the early Christian world.[2] Given that monasticism was originally a lay movement, at any rate, it is remarkable that monastic life rapidly became the ideal for some of the most influential intellectual figures in late antique and early medieval Christianity.[3] For its advocates, monasticism constituted the best means of attaining eternal salvation and gave rise, as such, to a whole chain of interwoven and evocative themes. As the earthly framework for the perpetual praise of God, it represented the anticipation of the heavenly life to come, or *vita angelica.* It was also believed to provide the possibility of a second baptism, of constant penance and purification from sin in a lifelong martyrdom. For Augustine, monasticism was the fullest possible realization of the City of God in the here and now. However, the dominant motif perhaps was the striving for *imitatio Christi* – the emulation of or even union with Christ's suffering and martyrdom in the hope of thereby approximating his relationship with God.[4]

Jesus himself offered the prototypical example by his own absolute chastity and poverty. The apostles, in the description of the first community of Jerusalem, provided an important model of brotherhood in shared poverty. Moreover, the Christian Scriptures repeatedly propound the search for perfection through the practice of ascetic virtues such as chastity, poverty, meekness, and renunciation of family ties:

> Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:48)
>
> If thou will be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (Matt. 19:21)
>
> All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given . . . and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (Matt. 19:11–12)
>
> If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

[2] For a superb and now indispensable exploration of this process, see P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

[3] On the early intellectual and institutional support of monasticism, see G. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Import on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

[4] For the early development and interconnectedness of these various themes, see M. Viller, "Martyre et perfection," *Revue d'Ascèse et de Mystique,* 6 (1925): 3–25, and idem, "Le martyre et l'ascèse," ibid., 105–42; Ladner, *Idea of Reform,* pp. 319–73. On Augustine's conception of monasticism in particular, see ibid., pp. 350 ff.

These and other classical loci of the ascetic tradition attest to the undeniable existence of a strongly perfectionist and world-rejecting strand in the Gospels.[5] Yet what quickly came to be perceived as the dominant axis in Christian teaching does not revolve around small and insulated communities of virtuoso ascetics,[6] but rather around a universal Church and ethic, that is, norms of faith, love, and charity incumbent upon all within the framework of a hierarchy dispensing the sacraments. The explicit endorsement of marriage, as legitimate and even indissoluble, clearly places limits on the isolated mortification of celibate collectivities.[7] The issues of chastity, virginity, and marriage were often at the crux of the controversies over perfection and the distinction between "two sorts of Christian," "two sorts of law," and so on. A distinction between the perfect and the ordinary Christian, and between precepts (for all) and counsels of perfection (for a minority) already appears in the patristic literature,[8] but it never led to the articulation of a full-fledged dual standard as it did in Buddhism. Christianity's strongly inclusive, universal Church-like leanings could only clash with, and prevent the full blossoming of, the perfectionist, elitist tendencies also in its midst. In time, mainstream Christianity came in fact to favor a rather "antiperfectible" stance – denying the possibility of total sinlessness in life and man's capacity to perfect himself without the help of divine grace – a stance most forcefully expressed in the reaction to the Pelagian

[5] See here the classical controversy around Schweitzer's thesis of Jesus' teachings as "interim ethos." See M. Werner, *The Formation of the Christian Dogma* (Boston: Beacon, 1957).

[6] On the early opposition to monks, see L. Gougaud, "Les critiques formulées contre les premiers moines d'Occident," *Revue Mabillon* 24 (1943): 145–63; H. R. Bitterman, "The Beginning of the Struggle between the Regular and Secular Clergy," in J. L. Cole and E. N. Anderson (eds.), *Medieval and Historiographical Studies in Honor of James Westfale Thompson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), pp. 19–26; P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 9–11.

[7] Paul became the crucial source on this issue: 1 Cor. 7:25–8: "Now Concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give counsel, as having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be faithful. I think therefore that this is good for the present necessity: that it is good for man so to be. . . . But if thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned."

[8] See D. Heyd, *Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 19 ff. The first explicit allusion to that distinction appears in the second half of the fourth century in Saint Ambrose's discussion of chastity; see Ambrose, *Concerning Widows* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), pp. 341–52; see also, soon after, Augustine, in connection with the story of the rich man (*Letters*, 157; *Holy Virginity*, 14). Ambrose further identifies the precepts with law and the counsels with grace in R. J. Deferrari (ed.), *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955). The higher standard is for those who are under grace and the lower for those under law.

heresy.[9] Ironically, this position reflects lesser faith in the perfectibility of man here and now than found in the more "otherworldly" original Buddhism.[10] The issue was never fully resolved, however, and confrontation between so-called Pelagian and Augustinian views on perfectibility and on the related issue of predestination has had momentous importance throughout the history of Christianity.[11] Monasticism cannot, moreover, be systematically aligned with either side of the controversy, since one could not hold a Pelagian or Augustinian view of monasticism itself. Augustine himself, taken to represent the antiperfectible stance, was a fervent supporter of monasticism, and did believe that the *summum bonum,* communion with God, could be enjoyed within this life.

Another factor diminishing the centrality of the distinction between perfect and ordinary Christians was the overshadowing priority of the distinction between clergy and laity, imposing itself from the beginning of the third century on,[12] where the criterion was not the search for perfection but the administration of the sacraments. Many saw the priest as the epitome of Christian life, superior to the monk, who safely kept his distance from the world's entanglements and temptations.[13] In addition, the definitions of both the way to perfection and of the Church itself remained ambiguous, offering a wide range of possible interpretations and historical developments. Monasticism represented only one of the possible paths to perfection, and was torn between different definitions of the monastic ideal itself (much more so than Theravada monasticism). Early Christian doctrine did not spell out any guidelines for the interaction between virtuosi and laity, thus leaving the otherworldly, ascetic strand in a situation of doctrinal and practical open-endedness.[14]

9 See Passmore, *Perfectibility of Man,* especially pp. 94–148; Ladner, *Idea of Reform,* especially pp. 319–40; R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968); also, Heyd, *Supererogation,* ch. 2 especially.

10 See this volume, Part II, pp. 41–2.

11 For the history of this tension up to its modern expressions, see especially Passmore, *Perfectibility of Man.* It should be noted that the notion of perfection did not necessarily carry the absolute tinge normally associated with the word in common usage. Ambrose, for example, would distinguish between two forms of perfection, ordinary vs. highest; the one in accordance with human powers, the other corresponding to the perfection of the world to come.

12 See A. Faivre, "Clercs/laïcs: histoire d'une frontière," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 57 (1983): 195–220.

13 This argument is already used by John Chrysostom, but he also believes that except for marriage, the Christian who lived in the world had the same obligation as the monk: detachment in the world. See Ladner, *Idea of Reform,* p. 126.

14 On this uncertainty and open-endedness of the ascetic tradition in its earliest stage, see Ladner, *Idea of Reform,* pp. 320–1; Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church,* chs. 2,3, and 4.

The interpenetration of otherworldly and worldly orientations

At the root of this complexity and open-endedness lies Christianity's characteristic intertwining of other- or outworldliness with worldlier orientations: otherworldly not only in the general sense of supramundane or transcendent, but also in the more specific sense of a strong world-negating, world-devaluing tendency; and worldly in the countervailing tendency to invest the world, man, and man's institutions in the world with religious value. This intertwining is already present in the doctrine of Christ himself as truly and fully both man and God – a paradox intrinsic to the Christian "mystery."[15] However, it is also at work in such basic concepts as the Kingdom of God, the City of God, and of course the Church as the universal communion of the faithful and the body of Christ itself.[16] The very verses on which the foundations of the Church were laid are striking in this respect: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church . . . and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt 16:18–19)

The history of Christianity is in fact often related as a gradual "unpacking" of this otherworldly/worldly Christian "bundle," with the progressive increase of worldly orientations and concomitant weakening of otherworldliness.[17] The original strength of the otherworldly strand, however, is open to debate. Louis Dumont accords it both ideological and historical primacy.[18] Ideologically, the more worldly orientations are seen as subordinated to, and encompassed by, the otherworldly ones in a hierarchy determined by their relative relevance to salvation. This original ideological structure is not very different, in his mind,

[15] For a succinct review of these trends, see E. Peters, *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), introduction.

[16] See, for example, Y. Congar, "Concepts et images de l'église" in J. Congar, *L'ecclésiologie du haut Moyen-Age* (Paris: Cerf, 1958). For an emphasis on the worldly implications of variant conceptions of the Church, the kingdom, and Christ in early Christian history, see J. F. Gager, *Kingdom or Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975) and E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

[17] See for example, R. N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964): 358–74. Such a conception also tends to assume, however, the myth of a golden age of otherworldly religiosity. See M. Hill's overview in *A Sociology of Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp. 228–51.

[18] L. Dumont, "A Modified View of our Origins: The Christian Origins of Modern Individualism," *Religion* 12 (1982): 1–27, followed by Bellah, Burridge, and Robertson, "Responses to Louis Dumont"; and Eisenstadt, "Transcendental Visions."

from that obtaining in Indian religions. The world is not condemned (although the temptation to do so, distinctive of the gnostic heresies, would recur in the history of Christianity), and there is definite latitude in worldly matters. Historically, Dumont sees the latter strengthening of worldly orientations essentially as the result of external events that, from Constantine on, influenced Christianity's gradual deviation from its original ideological structure.

Somehow contradicting his own argument, however, Dumont also stresses the transition between the out-worldly and the inner-worldly, "the incarnation of value," as lying at the very essence of Christianity. Indeed, it is rather this uneasy mediation of otherworldliness and worldliness – as well as of the corresponding antitheses of flesh/spirit, law/grace, Church/world, that inform Christian thought from the start[19] – that will receive emphasis here, contra Dumont, as an essential rather than contingent feature of Christianity, of critical importance for the history of Christian virtuosity. The Christian interpenetration of worldliness and otherworldliness is radically different from their neatly segregated and hierarchized coexistence in canonical Buddhism. It is also further deepened by the eschatological-chiliastic strand in Christianity, which invested the here and now of the primitive Church with millenarian expectation; the world and history were given soteriological meaning and a future direction,[20] in sharp contrast to the dominant Buddhist conception of the passage of time as only another aspect of samsara and of the general decay of things.[21]

19 I refer here to Caspary's analysis of the dyadic structure characteristic of the classical Pauline pairs – flesh/spirit, law/grace, church/world, letter/spirit, etc. – where the two poles are "not merely complementary" but truly opposed. Confirming the importance, for the understanding of Christian thought, of the strain to mediate between them, Caspary notes that this dyadic structure coexists with a triadic structure, stemming from the messianic conception of Christ, in which regard "the tension inherited from Jewish apocalyptic thought between this world or the present age (ha-olam ha-zeh) and the next world or Messianic Age (ha-olam ha-bah), though still essential, was no longer quite enough." See G. E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), especially p. 118.

20 There is, however, much debate concerning the nature, extent, and survival of this eschatological dimension in Christian theology. See Werner, *Formation of the Christian Dogma*. For some recent discussions of early Christianity as a millenarian or eschatological movement, see Gager, *Kingdom or Community;* S. R. Isenberg, "Millenarism in Greco-Roman Palestine," *Religion* 4 (1974): 26–46.

21 Limited historical recording and the sporadic development of millenarian expectations and movements in Theravada Buddhism do not contradict the overriding pessimistic conception of time and the fact that salvation (as opposed to merit) can be attained only through the utter escape from worldly involvements and from the here and now. See Chai-Shin Yu, *Early Buddhism and Christianity: A Comparative Study of the Founders' Authority, the Community and the Discipline* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), which contrasts early Buddhism and Christianity as "gnostic" vs. "eschatological."

If the ideological hierarchy noted by Dumont is indeed present in early and medieval Christianity, it is basically an unstable and fragile arrangement, constantly in need of reassertion to counter the basic ambiguities of the Christian message. Troeltsch's classic interpretation of this inner plurality or multivocality of Christianity distinguished a variety of tendencies – ascetic, secular, and theocratic – manifest as early as the Gospels; at times contradictory, these tendencies continued to exist side by side, eventually becoming bound in a "cosmos of mutual recognition and mutual help."[22] Within this framework, moreover, the ascetic tendency itself did not necessarily develop in only one specific direction, but could become oriented to a great variety of ends – the open-endedness referred to earlier: "Neither in theory nor in practice has asceticism evolved in a logical sense; it has simply grown out of the most divergent and contradictory ideas, and while these ideas have been to some extent fused with each other, the system contains within itself very varied possibilities."[23]

The intertwining of and unavoidable tension between the various inner tendencies of Christianity is acutely reflected in the search for perfection itself, ridden from the outset with basic dilemmas in determining the relative emphasis and precise meaning to be given to such key motifs of the ascetic life as contemplation, mortification, poverty, learning, good works, pastoral functions, individual prayer, liturgical functions, and manual labor. Underlying these dilemmas was the perennial tension between the lesser and greater otherworldly tendencies just mentioned, often couched in terms of the tension between a *vita contemplativa* and a *vita activa* that, ideally, should somehow be combined: "No man ought to be so completely inactive as not to think of his neighbor's advantage, nor so active as to neglect the contemplation of God."[24]

Much would depend on the terms of combination, however, and on the precise definition of the *vita activa*. A related but distinct question involved the preeminence of an inward- versus outward-oriented form of life in the search for perfection: In particular, was it enough to exercise the altruistic Christian virtues within the monastic community itself – Basil, for example, even considered that the monastic community was so self-sufficient that it needed neither secular clergy nor laity[25] – or should one turn to the outside, secular world? The same issue would arise from attempts to assess the relative value of eremitism

[22] E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church* (New York: Harper, 1960), especially pp. 238–54.
[23] Ibid., p. 244.
[24] Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, Book 19, ch. 19. Edited with translation by W. C. Greene (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 203.
[25] See Flew, *Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, p. 177.

and cenobitism: For many, the fact that the former did not allow for the enactment of the other-oriented Christian virtues made it automatically inferior to cenobitic monasticism.[26]

Monastic rules – such as those left by Basil, Pachomius, Columbanus, Caesarius, and Augustine, and the Master's Rule from which the most influential, that of Saint Benedict (480–550), is believed to be in great part derived – soon came to regularize the renunciatory life. Benedict's Rule would increasingly provide monasticism – mainly from the eighth century, when it reached a broad scope of diffusion with the backing of the Carolingian kings – with a quasi-dominant normative framework.[27] The rule itself, however, was not always unambiguous, and received varying interpretations, often in the name of a return to a "purer" enactment of its original injunctions. The issue of poverty in particular, with its various possible interpretations, received new meaning and prominence from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries with the strong surge of eremitic and apostolic movements throughout that period, and the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, all undermining the supremacy of the traditional Benedictine model. The Benedictine Rule, clearly, was not able to prevent the emergence of other trends, within and without the monastic world, each emphasizing different elements from the range of ideological and institutional options facing the ascetic life.

Division of labor and explicit exchange

In time, Christian theologians, too, developed conceptions approximating a double standard, articulating the relationship between virtuosi and others in terms of a division of labor that assigned specific functions to virtuosi within the collective of the Church. For example, monks were very early perceived as "crying on the sins of the world," "expiating the sins of others," and "praying for the world,"[28] all implying a notion of intercession and indirect penance, or, in Troeltsch's terms, "vicarious

[26] The traditional cleavage on this issue is between Cassian, for whom the solitary life is ultimately superior to the common life, and Basil, followed by Chrysostom and Jerome, for whom the communal, cenobitic ideal is superior to the solitary, individual one. For Benedict, eremitic life is the superior, end stage – destined for the very few only – to whom cenobitism is only the preparatory school. Aquinas, too, conceived the solitary ideal as ultimately superior.

[27] Cassian's *De Institutis Coenobium* was also very influential in the early shaping of the monastic idea, even if he did not write a rule; see J. Cassien, *Les institutions cénobitiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1965). The Rule of Saint Augustine, dating in its oldest form from the eighth century, was adopted and modified in the eleventh century by the new order of regular canons.

[28] Viller, "Le martyre et l'ascèse," p. 129; Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 61–2; G. Tellenbach, *Church, State and Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford: B. Blackwell 1940), pp. 46–7.

oblation," which appears as the direct extension of notions originally applied to the relation between Christ and the world:

> The idea of vicarious repentance and achievement is really a living category of religious thought; the vicarious offering of Christ both as a punishment and as a source of merit is only a special instance of a general conception. . . . Thus the duty of those who live "in the world" towards the whole is that of preserving and procreating the race – a task in which ascetics cannot share, while they for their part have the duty of showing forth the ideal in an intensified form, and of rendering service through intercession, penitence and the acquisition of merit. This is the reason for the enormous gifts and endowments to monasteries; men wanted to make certain of their own part in the oblation offered by monasticism.[29]

This notion was expanded by scholastic theology into a full-blown model of the "circulation of grace" between virtuosi – not only monks but also saints, often but not always of monastic background[30] – and the rest of the faithful. The two key principles were the transferability of merit from one person to another and from the living to the dead, and the mediation of salvation through the Church – a tenet altogether alien to canonical Buddhism. In short, the holier, more virtuous members of the Church accumulate a treasure of supererogatory merits; it is the task of the Church to manage this treasure and redistribute it to the less virtuous so as to help them to salvation.

This theory, it must be noted, had the advantage of acknowledging the special standing, and even superiority, of virtuosi, while at the same time sustaining the key position of the secular clergy in the regulation and supervision of lay access to the means of grace. It was certainly more compatible with the clergy's interests to activate this "circulation of grace" than to let monks and saints increasingly concentrate in their hands a role of intercession potentially threatening the ecclesiastical monopoly on the mediation of salvation.

Essential to the development of this model was the idea already present in Augustine that the prayers of the living could improve a dead person's status in the next world, a notion that culminated in the Cluniac order's institution of All Souls Day to help the dead.[31] Moreover, one did not have necessarily to expiate one's sins oneself: It was a common practice, fully endorsed by the Church, for those who wished and could afford to, either to substitute the amount of money deemed equivalent to the inflicted penance, or to find someone who, for a payment, would fulfill the penance in one's stead.[32] Reliance on the intercessory value of

[29] Troeltsch, *Social Teachings*, p. 242.
[30] See Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident*.
[31] In later formulations of the purgatory (an idea shown by Jacques Le Goff not to be fully explicit until the twelfth century) the dead could also intercede for the living.
[32] For the full analysis of these trends, see J. Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

the monastic order was thus deeply related to broader notions and practices of transmutation and absolution of penance, which it long supported and complemented. On the other hand, increased or easier access to modes of penance and absolution mediated by the secular clergy could also compete with and eventually lessen the role of the monastic order in the overall process of salvation.

The increasing "commercialization" of religious supererogation is a later phenomenon, starting with the Crusades and culminating in the sale of indulgences by the Church, so vehemently opposed by Luther.[33] However, this only brings into relief a characteristic of the relation between virtuosi and society already present in earlier stages; namely, that whatever the terms of the exchange established between them – mainly intercessory prayers for the remission of sins as against endowments and donations – these terms received fully explicit and legitimate ideological articulation. Although the notion of lay acquisition of merit, linked as it was with gift giving to the virtuoso, is strongly reminiscent of the Theravada *dana* relationship, it is important to stress that the latter does not involve such explicit exchange. Theoretically at least, no return is expected from the *bhikkhu* who merely provides the laity with a field of merit, that is, with the occasion to acquire merit through selfless giving; at the limit, to recall, the best gift is the one given without thought to its karmic benefits – something that holds even in the more reciprocal versions of the *dana* theory when monks reciprocate by the countergift of teaching the doctrine, or *dharmadana.*

A number of doctrinal features facilitate the idiom of explicit, voluntary exchange in the Christian setting relative to the Buddhist one. Although transferability of merit and related practices were already accepted features of Theravada Buddhism at a very early stage, they somehow remained of dubious canonical validity. At any rate, they certainly seem to contradict the canonical Theravada emphasis on self-reliance – however problematic the notion of "self" in this context – in the striving for salvation. In contrast, similar notions seem to have been present in Christianity from the very beginning, and to have had full-blown theological and scholastic support. Moreover, explicit exchange was made possible by the notion of a division of labor between the sides involved, itself taking place within the context of holistic, unitary, and organistic notions of the Christian collective;[34] the equivalent of these

[33] On the transferability of merit from one person to the other, see for example G. Tellenbach, *Church, State and Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1940) pp. 47, 78.

[34] Gager emphasizes, as already characteristic of early Christianity, the radical sense of community – open but asking for absolute and exclusive loyalty, and concerned with every aspect of the believer's life – which he sees as one of the most important factors in its success in institution building. See *Kingdom and Community:*

are much weaker, if not totally absent, in canonical Theravada Buddhism. This prevented the interaction between virtuosi and other Christians from becoming one of hierarchical interdependence – the Theravada model – and encouraged instead the notion of a more "egalitarian" explicit exchange within the framework of a differentiated but cohesive collective.

The horizontal and vertical principles

This "horizontal" emphasis on solidarity forms one of the major principles at work in the Christian ideological matrix. But the Church was always conceived in two dimensions: Horizontally it was the communion of people in Christ, a corporate organism sometimes almost coalescing with the notion of social harmony and order; vertically, it was the means for such communion, and, more specifically, "an institution formed from above and hierarchically structured, not only a simple association or corporation but an ideal superior and antecedent to its individual members."[35] It is important to stress that the hierarchy implied is thus not, or not only, one of spiritual or soteriological worth, but also one of institutional control and power of superiors over inferiors. This vertical "hierarchy of command,"[36] which is perhaps directly derived from the heteronomous character of the Christian faith propounding an individualized relationship to a personal God and His authoritative revelation from outside and above, is totally absent in Theravada Buddhism.

Much of the ideological incorporation and actual "functionalization" (in the sense developed in Chapter 2) of monkhood and virtuosi within Christian society can be accounted for in terms of the joint operation of these horizontal and vertical ideological principles. Although monasticism catered primarily to the individual religious aspirations of its members, it was also defined with respect to these two parameters. It perceived itself and was perceived horizontally as fulfilling specific and important functions in the life of the Christian whole.[37] Nevertheless, it also positioned itself vertically within the ecclesiastical hierarchy of control, which it never ultimately contested (one of the essential differences, incidentally, between monasticism and sects). Even the component of exchange in the relation between monks and nonmonks, to which both sides came voluntarily, freely, and to a certain extent, as

[35] Y. Congar, *Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat* (Paris: Cerf, 1951), p. 53.

[36] The formation of this "chain of command" in the early Christian community is analyzed in Chai-Shin Yu, *Early Buddhism and Christianity*, especially pp. 183 ff.

[37] On the development of this self-perception of the early ascetic community within the larger Christian whole, see Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church*, pp. 56–67.

equals, was stamped by the legitimacy given it by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which gradually came to regulate and use it on its own terms.

The monastic replication of the horizontal and vertical principles

No less important, the horizontal and vertical principles were replicated in the microcosm of the monastic world itself. This is most evident, horizontally, in the ideological valuation of the monastic "family," of communal brotherhood and internal solidarity within the individual monastery as the ideal community and self-contained whole – a theme much less salient in Theravada Buddhism;[38] and vertically, in the vow of obedience and the commitment to stability, that is, to lifelong affiliation with one's monastery of profession, as well as in the quasi-monarchic, absolutist definition of the abbot's authority.[39]

Vertically again, it is important to emphasize that Christian renouncers may not have been expected, any more than their Theravada counterparts, to be directly involved in the supervision and management of the social order. Nevertheless, the mutual reinforcement of the vertical parameter within the monastic world and the Church at large may have made Christian monasticism much more ideologically attuned to the sources and exercise of institutional power and to the exercise of religious power in the world.

This monastic replication of the horizontal and vertical principles, the equivalents of which are, it should be stressed again, much weaker in traditional Theravada Buddhist monasticism, should be interpreted as a double-edged phenomenon: It might support the corresponding mother principles operative in the Church and Christian society at large; but it might just as well invest Christian monasticism with an esprit de corps and institutional autonomy making it into a powerful and potentially independent rather than a smoothly integrated sector, operating with, against, or simply independently of the established secular and religious authorities. Indeed, much of the historical development of Christian monasticism can be understood as an oscillation between these two poles.

As a result, the doctrinal articulation of a neat division of labor and exchange between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi, under the benevolent regula-

[38] This contrast is richly analyzed in Collins, "Monasticism."

[39] The origin and development of obedience into the cardinal monastic virtue is analyzed by D. Knowles, "The Evolution of the Doctrine of Obedience," in idem, *From Pachomius to Ignatius: A Study in the Constitutional History of the Religious Orders* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp. 69–94; see also P. Salmon, *L'abbé dans la tradition monastique: contribution à l'histoire du charactère perpétuel des supérieurs religieux en Occident* (Paris: Sirey, 1962).

tion of the Church, gives only a partial picture of the actual historical situation, which was loaded, as will be explained later, with tension and increasing competition among the three parts involved: monks, secular clergy, and laity. As a matter of fact, the doctrinal model just outlined can be seen as the extreme example of a long-standing but not fully successful effort by medieval society and the Church in particular to define the social and spiritual status of monkhood. A clear expression of the ambiguous status of monks is that although medieval society, with its well-known concern with the hierarchical organization of the world, formulated elaborate schemes of social hierarchy, the place of monks in that hierarchy was extremely variable – sometimes at the very apex, above bishops and kings, at times grouped with the secular clergy, at other times kept distinct, and sometimes much lower or not even mentioned at all.[40] For example, Dionysius, the Pseudo-Areopagite (ca. 500) in his *Ecclesiastic Hierarchy* sets monks, albeit "perfect," below the "sacerdotal orders" (priests, ministers, mediators of the sacraments), and just above ordinary Christians within the large category of the (lay) "initiated."[41] In contrast, Abbo of Fleury, in the late tenth century, placed monks in the very first rank of both the social hierarchy and the scale of spiritual perfection. Although in earlier stages monks were most usually understood as a third order, next to the clergy and laity, later they were often merged with the clergy in a bipartite model of the Christian order, focusing rather on the distinction between clergy and laity. This bipartite ordering was itself to be displaced around the beginning of the eleventh century by a new tripartite model once again grouping monks with clergy within the category of prayers (*oratores*), but distinguishing them from fighters (*bellatores*), and tillers (*laborantes*).[42] Early expressions of this new tripartite model attributed to bishops Burchard of Worms and Gerard of Cambrai, in fact, appear more preoccupied with emphasizing the differentiation and interdependence than the relative hierarchical ordering between the various orders.[43] Different social sectors could favor different models, according to their own posi-

[40] See Tellenbach, *Church, State and Society*, pp. 50 ff. Tellenbach also notes that for Hugh of Fleury in the early twelfth century, bishops and priests were the very foundations of the Church, whereas monks and lower clergy were only its servants. Hugh of Flavigny, in contrast, placed holy hermits and perfect monks right after the apostles and before good bishops and priests in order of precedence at the Last Judgment.

[41] See *Hierarchie Ecclesiastique*, Books 5–6. See *Oeuvres complètes du Pseudo-Denys l'Areopagite*, translated with an introduction by M. de Gandillac (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1943), pp. 293–312.

[42] See G. Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, translated by A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[43] See G. Constable, "The Diversity of Religious Life and the Acceptance of Social Pluralism in the Twelfth Century," in B. McGinn and J. Meyendorff (eds.), *Christian Spirituality*, p. 33.

tion and interests. Uncertainty and fluctuation could be found at times even in the same author: For Aquinas the great mid-thirteenth-century systematizer, a man who acts under a vow merits far more from God than one who is not under any such obligation; all could attain to perfection, without vows and orders, but the religious state is clearly the shortcut to perfection; further, he deemed the contemplative life as superior to the active life,[44] and the solitary ideal as ultimately superior to the cenobitic one.[45] Nevertheless, laying out a complex system of criteria of excellence, he also saw orders devoted to preaching and teaching as the "most excellent," and when forming a hierarchy of the state of perfection, he placed bishops first, religious orders second, and parish priests and archdeacons third.[46]

Whatever these oscillations in the social position and status of monasticism (and perhaps because of them), monastic virtuosity – as in the Theravada model – implied segregation between virtuosi and society. This segregation was two-faceted, distinguishing monks not only from the laity but also from the clergy. Segregation was also a prerequisite of the Christian scheme of explicit exchange and division of labor: Monks must be pure and secluded from society (however seclusion is defined) for their intercessory role to be effective.

In the early phase of monasticism's ideological incorporation within the Church, one also encounters another form of "segregation" not found in the Theravada setting, namely, the need for monasticism to distinguish and dissociate itself from heretical and charismatic groups at odds with the emerging ecclesiastical hierarchy. On the whole, monasticism is usually understood to have sided with, rather than against, the evolving orthodoxy in coping with the heterodox challenge. The confrontation with the Arian docetist heresies was to be especially important both in the shaping of Christian orthodoxy and in the identification of monasticism with the orthodox camp. In Gager's opinion, however, there may well be here an orthodox reconstruction by late monasticism of a case that may not have been so clear-cut.[47] This may have helped to

[44] *Summa Theologica,* Part II, 2, Question 182, art. 1, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), vol. 4, p. 1937.

[45] *Summa Theologica,* Part II, 2, Question 188, art. 8; ibid., vol. 4, p. 1997.

[46] *Summa Theologica,* Part II, 2, Question 184, arts. 7 and 8; ibid., vol. 4, pp. 1950–3. Aquinas distinguishes here between state, order, and office, and then between intrinsic goodness and difficulty as criteria of excellence. Like Dionysius (see this chapter, fn. 41), he saw bishops in the position of perfecters, above monks as perfected.

[47] See J. F. Gager, "Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12 (1982): 359. On charges of heresy (Manicheism and Priscillianism especially) against monasticism, see Bitterman, "The Beginning of the Struggle between the Regular and the Secular Clergy."

establish monasticism's own credentials despite certain dangerous affinities between the ascetic ideal and some of the nascent heterodoxies, especially those with dualist leanings. At any rate, one factor in the incorporation of monasticism into the Christian collective was the monastic acceptance of and alliance with ecclesiastical authority. Congruent with the vertical principle already discussed, this acceptance could not but contrast with heretical and charismatic assertions of freedom from ecclesiastical mediation and authority, or even claims at constituting the only true Church.

This has brought us very far from the meticulous and detailed doctrinal regulation of the virtuoso–layman relation in canonical Buddhism, dominated, as explained, by a "segregative–connective" arrangement: instituting a clear-cut distinction and double standard between virtuoso and layman, but also avoiding any real disconnection between the two and maintaining them in a sort of necessary, hierarchical interdependence. The Christian model – also "segregative," but "transactional" as well – is built on much shakier and less-defined doctrinal foundations, and remains a secondary and contingent rather than a central feature of Christian life. It is contingent on the priesthood–laity cleavage, which forms the very cornerstone of the Christian Church; on a more multivocal and open-ended conception of the ideal of religious perfection itself; and on an explicit, "free," and thus dissolvable relation of exchange rather than on hierarchical interdependence. The doctrinal grounds for a historically resilient virtuoso–layman relationship seem thus to be less solid than in Theravada Buddhism, and there seems to be little to prevent disconnection between them.

Ideological plurality and the principle of hierarchization

Despite the many ambiguities and uncertainties, however, Christian doctrine did entail a strong "virtuoso impulse," encouraging the emergence of ascetic rigorism and the quest for spiritual perfection. In fact, one may see this virtuoso impulse as enhanced rather than hampered by a differentiation in Christian spirituality between the striving for perfection and the striving for salvation, conceived as two intimately related but not overlapping motifs. Such a differentiation is in fact already announced in the story of the rich man (Matt. 19:16–24), alluded to earlier. The rich man asks, "What good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?" to which Jesus answers, "If thou will enter into life, keep the commandments," and only then adds, "If thou will be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

Historically speaking, the striving for perfection, though never unre-

lated to the soteriological motif, acquired a dynamic of its own. Despite the incorporation of monkhood into the Church, ultimately a distinction remained between the priesthood, corresponding to an office, and monkhood, defined as a mode of life: A monk might be either lay or clerical, and monkhood was never erected into an office or function. Even at times when monks and clerics seemed to be fusing in the fundamental bipartite division of Christians into clergy and laity, "the essential distinction between office and mode of life and relatedly, between matters of the cult and matters of perfection would remain."[48] Comcomitantly, no matter how uncertain and fluctuating monasticism's spiritual status and social prestige, "matters of perfection" always retained the potential to determine the ultimate hierarchization of human beings, thus catapulting monks and even hermits to the very apex of the hierarchical order.

Although hierarchization was certainly a pervasive feature of medieval society, it could evolve along a number of competing and potentially conflicting axes. Tellenbach thus was able to discern three different principles of hierarchization – the ascetic, theocratic-ecclesiastical, and monarchical; individuals and groups might hold to one or more of these principles simultaneously (the first and last of these principles forming a more compatible combination than the others) or perhaps shift from one to the other.[49] Georges Duby has analyzed the development of alternative systems of classification in medieval society, and in particular the development from the beginning of the eleventh century, as already mentioned, of a tripartite system of social classification – men of prayer, of combat, and of labor – a process he has traced to a number of major changes affecting the balance of power among bishops, lay princes, and kings at the time.[50] Walter Ullman distinguished between two major medieval theories of government, an ascending one – chronologically earlier – locating original power in the people or in the community, and a descending one – according to which all power descends from God. The latter would drive the former underground and dominate the scene from the earlier middle ages until the late thirteenth century (the period focused upon in the present study), to be in turn gradually displaced in the succeeding centuries. Integral to these developments, in Ullman's view, is the fusion of Roman and Frankish conceptions of kingship and government, rather than "Christian" orientations proper.[51]

48 Congar, *L'ecclesiologie du haut Moyen-Age.*

49 See Tellenbach, *Church, State and Society.*

50 Duby, *Three Orders;* idem, *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 88–93. See also Le Goff, *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), pp. 234–43.

51 W. Ullmann, *Medieval Political Thought* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975).

To understand this ideological plurality of medieval society, it is indeed necessary to place Christianity within the wider context of a medieval civilization incorporating a range of pre- and non-Christian cultural orientations.[52] In contrast to the rather smooth coexistence of "high" Buddhism with non-Buddhist symbolic orientations in Theravada countries, medieval Western culture seems to have been characterized by a much greater and steadily increasing level of ideological tension and competition among the various cultural orientations and traditions evolving in its midst.[53] This was obviously intensified by the existence of an ecclesiastical institution that considered itself to be the mediator and gatekeeper of religious orthodoxy. Moreover, the incorporation of a worldly strand within the Christian renunciatory salvational orientation itself forced the latter to compete over arenas of worldly activity with other cultural tendencies – "pagan" magico-ritual orientations and "secular" Roman Imperial, Germanic-tribal, or Hellenistic-urban orientations. In addition, worldly orientations tended to acquire autonomous soteriological value, enabling them to compete with renunciatory asceticism as avenues of perfection and salvation. This had crucial implications for the status of ascetic virtuoso orientations within the cultural system as a whole: Whereas in Theravada societies the virtuoso renunciatory strand was rather tolerant of "lower" orientations, yet also safely insulated at the apex of the hierarchy of symbolic orientations, in the context of medieval Christianity it was increasingly challenged and ultimately defeated by competing ideological orientations, both religious and secular.

Much of monasticism's subsequent historical development is foreshadowed in this analysis of Christian ideological matrix. To some extent, we can argue that here again, as in Theravada Buddhism, there was a congruity between doctrinal premises and institutional developments. But it was a congruity based, to a great extent, on open-endedness and plurality, making for a wider range of options than in Theravada. The virtuoso search for perfection maintained a powerful momentum of its own, but oscillated among the multiple options offered by the dilemmas of the ascetic life; although some of these were present in Theravada Buddhism as well, they reached greater extremes and encompassed a much greater range of possible variations in medieval Christianity.

[52] Reaching for this pre-Christian stratum and exploring its functioning in medieval culture, see G. Gurevitch, *Les catégories de la mentalité médiévale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985).

[53] This is most clearly exemplified by the complex confrontation between "pagan" magico-ritual orientations and Christian ecclesiastical "high" culture, which has given rise to too extensive a scholarly literature to be referred to here. See especially E. Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); Van Engen, J. "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographic Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 519–52.

Christian virtuosity initially stabilized in the monastic, Benedictine form and developed a network of interaction with society and laity that was in many ways similar to the Theravada virtuoso relational structure. From early times, Christian monasticism displayed a strength of organizational structure, overall institutional autonomy, and political power that were not easily contained by mechanisms of segregation and exchange and that made for a more forceful interaction – perhaps even competition – with other groups and sectors. The result was a somewhat paradoxical combination of inherent instability and open-endedness, on the one hand, and institutional strength on the other – an inverse image of the Theravada combination of "looseness" or even weakness on many institutional parameters with an impressive degree of overall historical stability.

Later, starting with the early stages of the Gregorian reform, around the mid-eleventh century, the monastic sector attained an unparalleled degree of political and religious influence over society at large. However, as shown in the next chapter, it also underwent a process of internal differentiation and polarization that not only overflowed the classical, monastic forms of its institutionalization and dissolved their preeminence, but also undermined the elements of segregation and exchange between virtuoso and layman and thus, ultimately, the very existence of a distinct virtuoso sector.

7 Virtuosity institutionalized: monasticism in social context

Christian asceticism is thought to have started with the practice of various forms of supererogatory self-denial within the framework of ordinary family life. It is only gradually that ascetic ideals became intimately associated with the idea of total sexual abstinence and permanent separation from social life.[1] A pattern of withdrawal to the desert or the mountains, however, is recorded as early as the third century in Egypt and Syria, reaching the West (at first Italy and Gaul) only around the fourth century. Significantly for our present purposes, this desert tradition already stamped Christian monasticism with one of its most fundamental ambiguities. Whether as the domain of wild animals and demons, or at the extreme opposite, as the paradisiac place of encounter with God, the desert represented the anti-city and anti-civilization. However, under the impact of monasticism it was also quickly transformed, as conveyed in what has become a locus classicus of monastic literature – the *Life* of Saint Anthony – into a "city" of sorts.[2] The desert came to constitute, in fact, "a 'counter-world,' a place where an alternative 'city' could grow."[3]

Even at this stage, in what appears to have been a very fluid milieu where eremitic, semieremitic, and fully cenobitic forms of life coexisted,[4] ascetic life could assume a highly structured, quasi-military character, as in the densely populated monasteries founded in the Egyptian Thebaid by Pachomius in the first half of the fourth century. Pachomius gave the cenobitic tradition what was probably its earliest rule, characterized by the emphasis upon manual labor and total obedience to the superior. The Pachomian monastery, with church, refectory, hospital, guest house, and groups of monks organized according to occupation, was already an impressively self-sustained and differentiated structure, epitomizing the "desert city" paradox.[5]

[1] For the detailed analysis of this development as a complex and not self-evident process, see Brown, *The Body and Society.*

[2] See D. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1961); also J. Le Goff, "Le désert-forêt dans l'Occident médieval." In idem, *L'imaginaire médiéval,* pp. 59–75.

[3] Brown, *Body and Society,* p. 217.

[4] Chitty, *Desert a City.* This element of lability of the various emerging forms of religious life in the very early stages, where individuals and even groups evolved from one form of life into another, is emphasized in Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church.*

[5] H. Bacht, "L'importance de l'idéal monastique de Saint Pachôme pour l'histoire du monachisme chrétien," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 26 (1950): 308–26;

Organizational structures

Throughout its history, Christian monasticism has displayed a strong tendency to self-structuring and organization, at first in self-sufficient and autonomous monasteries – the original Benedictine model – but later also in centralized networks of monasteries striving to unify observance and discipline. Of crucial importance in the creation of such powerful structures were the vows of obedience to the abbot, the existence of irrevocable vows, and the commitment to stability – elements totally absent in the Buddhist Sangha.[6] (It is noteworthy, in this respect, that no counsel of obedience is explicitly formulated in the New Testament, in contrast with the vows of chastity and poverty, which do have clearer doctrinal grounding). Be that as it may, it is ironic that these premises, enshrined in the Rule of Saint Benedict, came to sustain a powerful organizational development that was in fact a perversion of Benedict's original model, where the emphasis had been on the autonomy of the individual monastery and the absolute authority of the abbot within a self-contained monastic unit.

Until the seventh and even eighth centuries, however, Western monasticism as it first appeared in Gaul and Italy retained a certain looseness: There were a number of rules (only some of which were preserved), often quite fluid and complemented by local customs; many monasteries actually functioned with no written rules at all.[7] Benedict of Aniane's reform, culminating with the Synod of Aachen (815) during the reign of Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, played a role in tightening and unifying the organization of monasticism by imposing the Benedictine Rule throughout the Carolingian empire.[8]

With the expansion of Cluniac monasticism in the tenth century (itself intended as a return to a purer enactment of Benedict of Aniane's reform), monasteries lost their classical Benedictine independence and became subject to the abbot of the motherhouse of Cluny, to whom each

for a recent, somewhat modified picture of Pachomius's militarylike institutional rigor, see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

6 On the early emergence of the principle of obedience in the ascetic community, see Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church*, especially pp. 49–55. Obedience was seen to be implied, by later theologians, in Christ's injunction to "follow him."

7 C. Courtois, "L'évolution du monachisme en Gaule," in *Il monachesimo nell' alto mediaevo e la formazione de la civilizatione occidentale* (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro, 1957), especially pp. 59–65.

8 See P. Schmitz, "L'influence de Saint Benoit d'Aniane dans l'histoire de l'Ordre de Saint Benoît," in *Il monachesimo nell' alto mediaevo;* C. Butler, *Benedictine Monachism* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 236–7; Knowles, *From Pachomius to Ignatius*, p. 8.

individual monk of any house made profession. This elaboration of a unified and hierarchical system would seem to form a strangely nonfeudal or antifeudal development, posing a sharp contrast to contemporary trends of territorial and political fragmentation.[9] The organizational potency and administrative rationality of the Cluniac "empire" should not be overestimated, however: It had little organizational or governmental apparatus and was based to a great extent on the reproduction of the feudal principles at work in society at large:[10]

> A majority of the houses of the Cluniac body were integrated by a charter specifying their obligations of obedience, limitations of autonomy, and a small annual census or tax. Externally therefore, the relationship was one of vertical dependence, not of horizontal equality, and the model was not a commune or federation but the feudal bond which was being elaborately developed in contemporary Europe and particularly in France. Cluny thus made use of the two most powerful ideas in early medieval society, that of the religious obedience of a monk to his abbot, and that of the fidelity and mutual obligations of vassal and lord.[11]

The Cistercian order partially reinstated the autonomy of the cenobitic unit: Each had its own abbot; daughter houses were subject to the control but not authority of the motherhouse; and all the houses were governed by decisions made in common at general chapters, in what seems to have formed a more "democratic" structure. Both the Cluniac and the Cistercian model, however, involved a characteristic attempt at some form of supralocal and centralized structure. It must be stressed, moreover, that Christian monasticism produced some important constitutional innovations in the articulation of such structures, which cannot be seen as just the internalization of principles of social organization prevalent in society at large. In particular, it retained crucial "egalitarian" features, mainly within monasteries but also in some of its overarching institutions, and thus remained a parallel and even antithetic form of organization vis-à-vis the ecclesiastical and secular hierarchies.

The overriding difference with the Sangha, however, is not only the nature, degree, and scope of organizational structuring and centralization, but the fact that these structures were developed and sustained

[9] For the emphasis on Cluny's organizational principles as contrary to those of the feudal structure at large, see J. F. Lemarignier, "Political and Monastic Structures in France at the End of the Tenth and Beginning of the Eleventh Century," in F. L. Cheyette, *Lordship and Community in Medieval Europe* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968), p. 117; J. F. Lemarignier, *La France médiévale: institutions et société* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970), pp. 199–200.

[10] Knowles, *From Pachomius to Ignatius*, p. 12. There is, more generally, much debate around the extent to which Cluny constituted a feudal or antifeudal structure. This debate does not so much focus on the internal organizational principles of the Cluniac network, but rather on Cluny's relations with local feudal lords – a topic to be treated later in this chapter (see fn. 46).

[11] Ibid., p. 12.

from within the monastic sector rather than by the political establishment. Kings and other laymen could and often did aim at influencing the choice of abbots; but the organizational structures themselves were never originated by them or based on their indispensable control and support.

The tendency to centralization and uniformity did not culminate within Benedictine monasticism, but in the new mendicant orders of the thirteenth century. It was only with the Dominicans that "the complete supranational religious order, at once fully centralized and fully articulated, achieved adult status."[12] In contrast with the Cluniac reproduction of the feudal principles at work in society at large, this new kind of centralization also furthered the "democracy" already initiated in the Cistercian constitution: It replaced the Benedictine authoritarian conception of the abbot elected for life with priors and a master-general accountable to elected general chapters. At the same time, though, these new structures were also put under the pope's direct control. What was involved here, therefore, was not a "democratic" opposition to authority and hierarchy as such, but rather the use of a "skillful combination of egalitarian opportunities, elected merit, and authoritative direction" to serve the order's main purposes, studying and preaching.[13] In pursuing these aims, many traditional features of monastic life – particularly monastic stability and enclosure – were discarded: As the necessary corollary of the new emphasis on preaching, the individual monk was made fully mobile, at the disposal of the order's head to be dispatched wherever need be. For Saint Francis, who heralded it, this new mobility may have been, if not a sign of individualistic freedom, at least another expression of utter poverty and renunciation and of his own attempt to free the religious vocation from its overgrowth of legalistic strictures. But even Francis, who had originally recoiled from imposing any elaborate rule and preferred his religious group to be bound only by ties of mutual charity and a common vocation, eventually did evolve a rule – albeit after much delay, and under papal pressure. Moreover, by combining the individual friar's state of utter disposal and the absence of effective constitutional checks upon the head of the order, Francis's rule opened the way, in fact, to absolutist and ultimately despotic use of religious authority.[14]

Another expression of strong organizational structuring and of the combined operation of the vertical and horizontal principles discussed in the previous chapter is the monastery's tendency to encompass people and functions normally external to them or on their margins – a variant

[12] Ibid., p. 53.
[13] Ibid., p. 57.
[14] Ibid., p. 48.

of the desert city paradox alluded to earlier. Benedict's ideal monastery was, economically and spiritually, a rather self-contained unit that could fulfill many functions either by drawing on its own members or by hiring external manpower when need be. Many of the large monasteries came, in fact, to display elaborate internal organization and differentiation replicating all the crucial functions of a self-governing unit, as exemplified in the celebrated plan of Saint Gall, the ideal plan of a monastery drawn at Reichenau around 820.[15] However, they also came to incorporate, within the walls of the monastery and under the abbot's control, sectors of the population that were not properly monastic. Long before the emergence of the lay brothers (as in Vallombrosa in the eleventh century and the Cistercian order in the twelfth) and of the third orders (thirteenth century), laymen would occasionally "give" themselves with their possessions to the monastery and commit themselves to some specific task for the monastery, which from then on was responsible for their daily care.[16] This capacity to incorporate nonmonastic members reached its epitome in the extreme and uncharacteristic example of Saint Riquier, a prominent monastery in Gaul that was destroyed in the 881 Norman invasion and later equaled in size only by Cluny and Clairvaux. Saint Riquier was a fortified city, a bourg, in which the monastery owned all the houses and where both the lay population (some seven thousand inhabitants obligated to pay taxes and perform military and other services for the monastery) and some three hundred monks were organized for practical and religious-ritual purposes under the strict regime of a lay-abbot.[17] This extreme example of totalistic and expansive monastic organization had no known historical offshoot. The more usual pattern of extramonastic expansion of the monastic community involved the establishment of monastic confraternities that monks from other monasteries, secular clergy, or laymen could join to be assured of prayers for their own souls or for those of their relatives.[18] Even this looser formula,

[15] See W. Horn and E. Born, *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of, and Life in, a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

[16] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 111. This was done according to various formulas regulating the specific disposal of property, which sometimes remained partially in the layman's possession. See J. Avril, *Le gouvernement des évêques et la vie religieuse dans le diocèse d'Angers, 1148–1240* (Lille: Cerf, 1984), pp. 812–3.

[17] J. Hubert, "Saint-Riquier et le monachisme bénédictin en Gaule à l'époque carolingienne," in *Il monachesimo nell'alto mediaevo*, pp. 293–309.

[18] Dealing more especially with the Cluniac commemorative *fraternitas*, but also amply discussing the development of such monastic confraternities in general, see J. Wollasch, "Les obituaires, témoins de la vie clunisienne," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 22, no. 2 (1979): 139–171. Also on Cluny, see H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Unions and Confraternity with Cluny," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1956): 152–62.

however, entails a formalized incorporation of the laity within some extended framework of monastic solidarity, often cutting across local and national boundaries, and of a sort that did not emerge in the Theravada setting.

As a clear result of this general capacity for self-structuring, Christian monasticism was never as systematically dependent upon external political forces to enforce its inner purity as the Sangha was (which of course does not imply that purity was always successfully maintained). Kings or nobles occasionally took it upon themselves to intervene in these matters. This was notably the case in the Carolingian era, with the imperial support given to the spread of Benedictine monasticism at the expense of previous monastic traditions through both Boniface's missionary efforts and Benedict of Aniane's reform. Underlying the support to Benedict's Rule was perhaps less a concern for ascetic rigor than a legalistic and institutional interest in monastic unity and standardized discipline, facilitated by the Rule of Saint Benedict's acceptance of episcopal supervision. Be that as it may, even Charlemagne's and his son Louis the Pious's active support of monastic reform never attained the exemplary power of the Ashokan *sasana* reform as a model for a recurrent, traditional pattern of monastic reform through external, secular intervention. On a more localized level, many nobles, from the tenth century on, developed a strong personal interest in the purity of the monasteries of which they were the founders or patrons.[19] It was by then accepted to consider the monastery as the private property of whomever founded it on his lands; in contradiction to Saint Benedict's emphasis on free and autonomous election of the abbot, the founder's proprietary right also involved the right of choosing the abbot – a major way of controlling monastic discipline and purity. On the whole, however, this kind of lay involvement with monastic reform remained confined to the use of the monastery as a sort of private status symbol asserting the nobles' new strength and legitimacy vis-à-vis an enfeebled monarchy, and did not entail any principled conception of lay guardianship of monastic purity.

Organizational strength can thus be taken as a clear criterion of institutional vigor and autonomy. Nevertheless, it also placed monasticism at the better disposal of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and papacy – a trend already evident with Cluny and culminating with the (admittedly not classically monastic) mendicant orders – and could be used to better incorporate the virtuoso ascetic life into the wider social scene (as in the case of Carolingian monasticism). Indeed, as already suggested, monasticism's overall institutional strength should be assessed on the basis not

[19] See P. D. Johnson, *Prayer, Patronage and Power: The Abbey of La Trinité, Vendôme, 1032–1187* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), pp. 41–3; Avril, *Le gouvernement des évêques*, pp. 811–12.

only of its organizational structures alone, but also of the position of these structures in society at large.

Monastic economy

Christian monks could work, farm, and manage their collective property as they wished. Consequently, they were never as dependent on the laity for material support, least of all for food, as were their Buddhist counterparts. In time, monasteries displayed such craft and entrepreneurship in the cultivation and management of their property that they "gradually came to represent the largest single concentration of wealth in many parts of Western Europe."[20]

The accumulation of wealth, however, should not be seen as directly stemming from an ascetic, productive mystique of work. The monastic attitude toward work, primarily conceived as manual labor, retained a marked ambiguity. There is evidence of early itinerant Christian monks strikingly similar, in their total reliance on lay offerings, to the ideal early Buddhist wandering monks.[21] Nevertheless, early monks and hermits did work, as a rule, for their subsistence. The Pachomian regime certainly involved a great deal of manual labor as both the best expedient against the dangers of *accedia* – boredom – and a necessary means of self-support. On the whole, however, early monks probably despised all work and trade, which were perceived by them, as by all their contemporaries, as signs of a lowly, peasant condition. What came to prevail, though, was the more positive attitude to work, exemplified in Benedict's Rule, as an essential ingredient of ascetic life and a sign of humility, if never the object of glorification as such and never an end in itself.[22] Manual labor receded in importance with Benedict of Aniane's reforms, yielding to a new emphasis on the liturgy as the "work of God," a

20 On the economic aspects of Christian monasticism, see J. A. Raftis, "Western Monasticism and Economic Organization," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8, no. 4 (1961): 452–67; R. Génestal, *Role des monastères comme établissements de crédit, étudié en Normandie du XIe à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Rousseau, 1901); G. Duby, "Le monachisme et l'économie rurale," in *Hommes et structures du Moyen-Age*, pp. 381–93; idem, "Economie domaniale et économie monétaire: le budget de l'abbaye de Cluny entre 1080 et 1155," *Annales E.S.C.* 7 (1952): 155–71, also in *Hommes et structures du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1973), pp. 61–83; P. Schmitz, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît* (Maredsous: Les Editions de Maredsous, 1942), pp. 11–50.

21 See A. Guillaumont, "Le travail manuel dans le monachisme ancien: contestation et valorisation," in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien: pour une phénoménologie du monachisme* (Begrolles en Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979), ch. 7.

22 See F. Prinz, "Monchtum und Arbeitsethos," in *Arkese und Kultur, Vor- und Frühbenediktinisches Mönchtum an der Wiege Europas* (Munich: Beck, 1980); A. J. Gurevitch, *Les catégories de la culture médiévale*, especially pp. 266–7.

tendency that climaxed in the tenth century with Cluny's permanent *opus Dei.* Manual labor made a temporary comeback in the early phases of the Cistercian order and some eremitic orders; as is well known, however, the Cistercians soon introduced lay brothers to work the land and to take care of economic and managerial tasks, thus freeing the monks for spiritual endeavors.

The sheer scope, dynamism, and highly rationalized nature of monastic economy relative to the rest of contemporary society are undeniable. Monasteries not only held a huge proportion of all cultivated lands,[23] but also led the way in the application of new technologies (the water mill, the mechanical clock, intensive methods of cultivation, bookkeeping) and often operated as the equivalent of banking institutions and even insurance companies. In a situation where usury was outlawed, if not nonexistent, monasteries provided alternative, legitimate forms of credit.[24] Leasing, mortgaging, and pawning property to monks were convenient ways to obtain money, often used by Crusaders in particular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In addition, monasteries encouraged the operation of local fairs around their precincts and promoted translocal trade, triggered urban development, in their vicinities and supported a host of arts and crafts related to monastic practices and ceremonial needs.

At the same time, however, we must be careful not to project upon traditional monasticism as a whole a picture of economic expansion and "rationalization" generated mainly on the basis of the economic successes of the Cistercian order in its early stages – itself now undergoing a certain amount of reassessment.[25] Many monasteries suffered impoverishment through mismanagement. Moreover, there was never any absolute injunction that monks be entirely self-supporting; that monks engaged in agricultural labor and general economic activity should not divert our attention from the even more significant fact that much of the monastic economy was nurtured as much by the input of lay endowments (to be discussed in greater detail), ecclesiastical tithes, and by a number of trading and other crucial privileges, as by economic entrepreneurship proper.

As a result of their extensive wealth and their direct involvement in the

[23] No precise numbers exist concerning monastic wealth and different types of wealth in the High Middle Ages. Herlihy assesses ecclesiastical landed property in general rather than monastic property in particular to have reached about a third of all cultivated land around the eleventh century. See "The Ecclesiastical Economy of Medieval Europe," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4 (1986): pp. 227–31.

[24] Génestal, *Role des monastères.*

[25] I have dealt with these issues in greater detail in "Monasticism and the 'Protestant Ethic.'"

economic sphere, monasteries frequently became entangled in legal and economic struggles, and incurred a great deal of resentment in the process.[26] Among others, the payment of tithes – by monks or to monks – was a recurrent subject of dispute between monks and secular clergy. The issue was not purely economic, since it involved long-standing controversies over the legal status of monks within the Church.[27] Although in the early Middle Ages monks were as a rule forbidden to receive and required to pay tithes, by the twelfth century, most monks received tithes, and many were exempt from paying them. The short-lived attempt of the Cistercians to refuse tithes was also an attempt to reject the worldly strife that accompanied them: Monastic wealth brought with it the many rights and duties of feudal lordship, thus unavoidably involving monks in a whole network of entanglements with both vassals and other lords.

The rapid failure of those religious orders that tried to disengage from the corrupting influences of economic entanglements with the world – the early Cistercians and Franciscans in particular – may attest to the strength of the forces pulling away from monastic poverty and toward wealth and involvement. We should note, however, that although deeply involved in a network of economic exchange with the outside world, monasteries were on the whole powerful and autonomous partners in the process of exchange, and displayed a type of entrepreneurship (and a degree of rationalization) in economic matters uncharacteristic of the Theravada Sangha.[28] These undoubtedly strengthened their general institutional autonomy and bargaining power in their interaction with both laity and Church.

The gift relationship

Here too a gift relationship emerged, albeit ad hoc and without any doctrinal basis at first, and only gradually receiving ideological articulation.[29] Unlike the donations to the Theravada Sangha, endowments to

[26] On lay resentment and even physical violence against monks, see U. Berlière, "Monastères et sujets au Moyen-Age," *Revue Bénedictine* 43 (1931): B22–41; 44 (1932): 44–70.

[27] See G. Constable, *Monastic Tithes from their Origins to the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1964). Such developments provide important clues as to changes in the position of monks within the Church, and their increasing incorporation within the clergy.

[28] Sri Lanka's monastic "landlordism," however, would seem the closest to Western monasticism in this respect.

[29] Donations to monasteries have recently become an important focus of historical study. See B. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of St. Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); C. B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); J. Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey and its Benefactors, 1132–300* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1987); S.

Christian monks never represented a routine practice involving the offering of their daily bread, and hence never represented as primordial and necessary a relation of interdependence. Although gifts of property by noble donors are mentioned in the Rule of Saint Benedict (ch. 59), it is only incidentally, as it were, as something that noble families might want to do when offering one of their sons to the monastic life. Otherwise, and except for forbidding all private possession and all acceptance of gifts by individual monks, the rule does not concern itself with the issue of donations to the monastery, and nothing in this basic text of monastic discipline would predict the scope and significance that donations to monasteries were to acquire in later centuries. The gift relationship did develop, however, on a very large scale and involved, among else, vast tracts of land. As Raftis notes, it is difficult to determine how the grant of land in particular originally became a characteristic form of donation.[30] It may well have been, as Southern seems to think, simply the most fruitful use that wealthy lords could make of huge and sparsely populated wastes that they had in any case no means of exploiting.[31] It may have also provided a convenient way to get rid of lands burdened with taxes and feudal obligations. Be that as it may, lay donations of land and various sources of income (churches, annuities, pasture and forest rights, tolls, etc.) played an enormous role in monasteries' accumulation of wealth at least until the end of the twelfth century. At that point, donations of land sharply decreased, to be replaced in part by endowments in money.

It must be noted that, even in the best of times, monasteries were often expected to reciprocate their benefactors' generosity not only in spiritual but sometimes in a very practical and material manner. Merovingian and Carolingian kings, for example, were generous benefactors and may even be said to have played a decisive role in launching Western monasticism on its road to the huge concentration of wealth; but they also felt free to allocate monastic properties to vassals or use them for their own purposes, especially in wartime. Monasteries might also be asked to loan

D. White, *Custom, Kinship and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); E. Mason, "The Donors of Westminster Abbey Charters, ca. 1066–1240," *Medieval Prosopography* 8 (1987): 23–39; idem, "Timeo Barones et Donas Ferentes," in D. Baker (ed.), *Religious Motivation: Biographical and Sociological Problems for the Church Historian* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1978), pp. 61–75; C. M. Miller, "Donors, their Gifts and Religious Innovation in Medieval Verona," *Speculum* 66 (1991): 27–42.

30 Raftis, "Western Monasticism and Economic Organization."

31 Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, p. 229; this was also argued in the case of the Cistercians by B. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 50 ff.

money to the king or provide him with military contingents when need be, recruited from the population on their territory. Even lesser founders and patrons of monasteries sometimes considered these as their personal property, whose economic resources they could tap as they wished. The duty of hospitality in particular, not only to a noble or royal benefactor but also to his whole entourage, could be a heavy economic drain.

Donations, moreover, could not only be given with very tangible and material returns in mind, but also become fully and explicitly "transactional." An endowment could be made, for example, against the explicit commitment of the monastery to provide the donor with food, clothing, or even lodging for the rest of his life. In time, indeed, there seems to have developed a whole spectrum of donations ranging from the relatively disinterested *pro anima* gift – in the sense of involving otherworldly spiritual interests only, and carrying no expectation for any reciprocity from the monks but for the promise of intercessory prayers for the donor's or his relatives' souls – to transactions involving gifts and counter-gifts with various degrees of reciprocity coming sometimes close, in their practical results, to buying and selling.[32]

Here too, and perhaps even more so than in the Theravada setting, gift giving obviously became tied to particular and localized interests. Donations to monasteries could become a way of preventing property from passing into the hands of more powerful lords, or of somehow consolidating family property – especially in cases where the abbot himself was a relative. Endowing a monastery where one had a child or other kin was also a way of contributing to the relative's well-being and living standard. Moreover, donations, were most often given with nothing but the donor's individual salvation in mind, and that of his closest relatives. However, here too donations to monasteries could occasionally acquire more generalizing, collective overtones. Witness the wording in Cluny's foundation charter (910):

> I give moreover, all these things . . . first for the love of God; then for the soul of my lord king Odo, of my father and my mother; for myself and my wife – for the salvation, namely, of our souls and bodies; and not least, for that of Ava who left me these things in her will; for the souls also of our brothers and sisters and nephews, and of all our relatives of both sexes; for our faithful ones who adhere to our service; for the advancement, also, and integrity of the catholic religion.

[32] All these, however, were most often perceived as pious donations *pro anima*, indicating the absence of clear distinctions in types of reciprocity for those involved. See M. Castaing-Sicard, "Donations toulousaines du Xe au XIIe siecle," *Annales du Midi* 70 (1958): 288–54. See, however, for evidence of a clear distinction, in the donor's mind, between donations *pro anima* and other transactions with the monkhood, Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister*. Further emphasizing, perhaps, the "otherworldly" orientation of monastic endowments is the fact that a fair share of them were enacted just before the donor's death.

Finally, since all of us Christians are held together by one bond of love and faith, let this donation be for all – for the orthodox, namely, of past, present or future times.[33]

In the case of royal monasteries in particular, that is, monasteries founded and endowed by kings, and serving as places of kingly burial as well as repositories of kingly regalia, donations acquired a broader, "public" significance by contributing to the glamour of a monastic worship closely associated with the interests of kingship or even empire.[34] A similar process obtained, on a lower scale, around lesser monasteries that acquired saintly relics attracting lay donations and becoming public emblems of collective pride. Donations, moreover, could also acquire a broader collective or redistributive orientation due to the monasteries' involvement in charitable relief, theoretically resulting in the redistribution of a tenth of their overall income to the poor,[35] and specifically mentioned in many a foundation charter as a principal function of the monastery.[36] Although monastic charity was often of a purely ritualistic nature, limiting itself to the taking in charge of a symbolic number of "poor" attached to the monastery's family of dependents, it could also at times reach significant proportions and even become, as in the case of Cluny, a heavy economic burden. More generally, however, charity to the poor did not necessarily have to be mediated through the monks. Neither the interpretation of monks as the most truly "poor" because committed to voluntary poverty in the ascetic life, nor monasteries' active involvement in charity to the poor, would ever obliterate the fact that giving to monasteries was never the only form of religious donation available to either common layman or king in the Christian Middle Ages. Relatedly, while generous gift giving was one of the traits early associated with the idea of kingship,[37] it never became as crucial a component of kingly legitimacy as in the case of Buddhist kingship, and it did not necessarily focus on giving to monasteries (or even the Church at large) in particular.

As it is well known, monastic wealth became a major source of corruption and relaxation of ascetic standards. Paradoxically, laymen tended to

[33] E. F. Henderson, *Select Documents of the Middle Ages,* (London: G. Bell, 1892), pp. 329–33.

[34] See the analysis of the Abbey of Saint Denis in particular in Duby, *Age of the Cathedrals,* ch. 5.

[35] See W. Witters, "Pauvres et pauvreté dans les coutumes monastiques du

bestow donations and protection on monasteries or orders that they perceived as purer and holier, in a process usually leading to further monastic slackening and need for reform. Admittedly, there were ambiguities in the original injuction of poverty: Did it mean "poverty in spirit" or actual material poverty; and did it address only individual or also collective poverty? Wealth, moreover, made it possible to better fulfill the duty of Christian charity. This may explain in part, beyond the assumption of an ever-lurking and all-too-human greediness, why monks were so easily and systematically swept into the acceptance of donations that ultimately contradicted the original renunciatory ideals of monasticism and, unlike in Buddhism, were not backed by any specific doctrinal injunction. But as stressed by Georges Duby,[38] a determinant factor might be found in the extant images of consumption to which both monks and laymen were captive. When it came to the praise of God – up to the eleventh century at least – nothing less than splendid ceremony would do; monastic wealth, rather than being refused or redistributed, went to feed the sumptuous glorification of God, of which Cluny offered the prototype. For the Cluniacs indeed, as confirmed in Cowdrey's skillful interpretation, material splendor and the importunity with which gifts were solicited were neither mere preoccupation with corporate material wealth for its own sake nor just a reward for their faithful monastic observance, but an integral part of the monks' work of intercession for the living and the dead: "Every part of Cluny's buildings, every embellishment of its worship, and every parcel of the endowments which sustained it, spoke of the glories of heaven and commended to St. Peter and St. Paul the souls of the benefactors for whose salvation the monastic round was performed."[39]

With the Cistercian reaction and search for a more inward and sober worship, the fruits of systematic labor – mostly by the lay brothers – came to be rechanneled into the management of land and property. This, in turn, as the standard account goes, contributed to the further expansion of wealth and to the rapid corruption of the early Cistercian ideals.[40] Strikingly, at any rate, even the Cistercians did not disentangle themselves from the acceptance of donations that they only partially redefined – refusing only property burdened with feudal obligations (and otherwise taking advantage of all the usual indemnities and privileges).

[38] G. Duby, *Saint Bernard et l'art cistercien* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).

[39] H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. 131.

[40] See L. J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1977). There is now increasing evidence, however, that what were thought to be later signs of "corruption" were already in evidence in even the first "wave" of Cistercian expansion, thus questioning the very nature of the Cistercian endeavor from its very beginning.

However, modes of consumption among the laity, and related concepts of worship, were themselves affected by changes in the socioeconomic environment, with crucial implications for the flow of donations. With growing urbanization and commercial activity in the twelfth century, Duby argues, the interest of princes shifted from endowing splendid monasteries to promoting a clerical technocracy to help run their worldly business. More generally, it has been often noted that the far-reaching economic and ideological changes of the twelfth century marked the beginning of the decline in lay donations and consequently in monastic wealth. It is remarkable, however, that despite the emergence of such trends as early as the first half of the eleventh century, Benedictine monasticism apparently withstood, and better than is often thought (at least up to the mid-twelfth century), what many have seen as a major "crisis" of the monastic institution. Only toward the end of the twelfth century can one really speak of a decline in donations.[41] The sharp contemporaneous decline in the practice of child oblation, that is, committing children to the monastic life – may also have been an important factor in the crisis. Before it rather abruptly fell out of favor, this previously common practice, as already mentioned often induced wealthy aristocratic families to endow the monastery to which their child was devoted, and even to ensure that aristocratic standards of living were maintained.[42]

Be that as it may, the relation of exchange between monks and laymen – which, as we have said, was purely voluntary and also, doctrinally at least, of a relatively secondary and "dissolvable" kind – was then undoubtedly undermined. As long as it did obtain, however (roughly from the sixth to the twelfth centuries, and even beyond, if in a much attenuated form), it displayed some similarities to the Theravada gift relationship. On the diverging side, however, the explicit reciprocity that characterized it (in contrast to the Theravada *dana* relation) received further accentuation, as monasteries increasingly provided not only spiritual intangibles but also a variety of concrete economic and social services in holding their part of the exchange.

Between autonomy and incorporation

Another indication of the greater autonomy of Christian monkhood (stated negatively) is that, in contrast with what happened in Burma and Thailand, monastic life was never incorporated as a normal, temporary stage in the average life cycle, or in other words, never became a sort of rite of passage. There was some link to the life cycle among the highest

41 J. Van Engen, "The 'Crisis of Cenobitism' Reconsidered: Benedictine Monasticism in the Years 1050–1150," *Speculum* 61, no. 2 (1986): 266–304.

42 Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, pp. 228–9.

strata, both secular and clerical, where young men would be sent to a prestigious monastery for a few years of schooling, or one might retire to a monastery in old age.[43] This remained, however, a totally unsystematic and voluntary pattern limited to the social elites, rather than a norm applicable to all. Nobles and princes, moreover, were usually satisfied with the *vestitudo ad succurendum,* ensuring that they died and were buried dressed in a monk's cowl in the hope of enhancing their chances of salvation.[44]

Christian monasticism also displayed, in contrast with the Sangha, an increasing and self-conscious tendency to acquire independence from local units and authorities – both ecclesiastical and secular. This tendency, already noted with regard to the development of broad supralocal and supranational structures, is only the more noteworthy in the light of contrary beginnings. Monastic communities were made formally subservient to the ecclesiastical hierarchy as early as the Council of Chalcedon (451), whose resolutions were repeatedly invoked by bishops in their attempts to maintain their diocesan right of control over the monasteries. The Rule of Saint Benedict (ch. 64) enjoined the monastic community (then still essentially lay) to refer to the external authority of the local bishop when need be, for instance in cases in which difficulties arose over the election of the abbot. Early medieval monasteries not only accepted, but even relied on the hierarchical authority and sanction of the secular Church. The Church was made the protector (at least in theory) of the monasteries' spiritual interests – a role not unlike that of the king vis-à-vis the Sangha – helping the abbot maintain internal discipline, and even supervising the abbot himself.

Such power of supervision and interference could easily be abused, however. The history of the relation between monasteries and bishops is one of pervasive tension and recurrent conflict, involving not only matters of moral and spiritual rights but also, more often than not, the control of temporal wealth.[45] Monasteries strove to become exempt from obedience to local bishops, with varying success: Exemption could be total or partial, and was more common in certain areas than others. It appears to have been especially weak in Germany, where it nearly totally disappeared in the eleventh century. Lay patrons, or nobles and other vassals to whom kings would give monasteries and/or monastic offices (including the position of abbot), could also be the source of

[43] See for example Johnson, *Prayer, Patronage and Power,* pp. 41–3; Avril, *Le gouvernement des évêques,* pp. 811–12.

[44] L. Gougaud, *Dévotions et pratiques ascétiques du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Pax, 1925), pp. 129–42.

[45] On the relation between bishops and the regular clergy, see for example, Dom P. Schmitz, *Histoire de l'Ordre de Saint Benôit,* ch. 3; Avril, *Gouvernement des évêques,* pp. 813–20.

serious interference, disposing of monastic property and interfering with monastic life as they saw fit.

Cluny's recommending itself to the sole authority and protection of the Holy See – a still rather distant and ineffective force at that stage – and thereby removing itself entirely from the control of both secular lord and bishop, is the best-known if far from unique example of Christian monasticism's struggle for autonomy, of no equivalent in the Theravada context. Although Cluny's insistence on exemption from episcopal authority and local lay interference seems to be clearly antifeudal in orientation, there is now much evidence that Cluny, in fact, was not necessarily always at odds with local authorities, and was even willing to entertain positive and mutually supportive relations with many local lords and bishops.[46] Be that as it may, one has to recall that Cluniac independence from local lay and ecclesiastical authority was ultimately warranted by another, external, and in fact superior authority, that of Rome, to which Cluny admitted allegiance. It might well not have been able to develop and maintain its unique autonomy without the active support of the Papacy.[47] Cluniac autonomy, in fact, did undergo a temporary setback when Pope Benedict IX (1033–45) withdrew papal support, leaving Cluny vulnerable to the attacks of the bishop of Macon.[48] On the other hand, Cluny was far from totally subject to the Papacy, even at the time of its close alliance with the Gregorian papacy, and repeatedly displayed marks of independent policy. This applies even in such crucial matters as papal theocratic claims against the empire, which Cluny did not fully sustain,[49] or the opposition to lay investiture of bishopries, in which Cluny came out more moderate than Rome – perhaps due to the development of a tight network of interactions with the aristocracy, a class that the Gregorian project was envisioned to weaken.[50]

Beyond the (in many way unique) case of Cluny, the Gregorian Reform may be seen as having had the same effect on monasteries as on all other ecclesiastical offices and property, namely, ensuring their greater freedom from lay interference. Nevertheless, it also contributed, ultimately, to strengthening both papal and episcopal authority over monks. The historical process is thus one of oscillation between phases of lesser

[46] See H. Diener, "Das Verhaltnis Clunys zu den Bischofen vor allem in der Zeit seines Abtes Hugo (1049–1109)," in G. Tellenbach (ed.), *Neue Forschungen uber Cluny und die Cluniacenser* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1959), pp. 219–338; H. E. Mager, "Studien uber das Verhaltnis der Cluniacenser zum Eigenkirchenwese," in Tellenbach (ed.), *Neue Forschungen*, pp. 167–214.

[47] For the development and gradual enhancement of Cluny's autonomy through a unique pattern of relationship with the Papacy, see Cowdrey, *Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform.*

[48] Ibid., pp. 44 ff.

[49] Ibid., pp. 157 ff.

[50] See especially Mager, "Studien uber das Verhaltnis."

and greater autonomy, if always within the framework of ecclesiastical discipline.

Indeed, the difference with the Sangha does not lie simply in Christian monasticism's greater potential for institutional autonomy, but rather in its greater tendency to oscillate between autonomy and incorporation. In many respects, we can see Christian monasticism in the first stage, from the sixth to the eleventh century (and during the Carolingian era in particular), as sharing with the Sangha a common baseline of social incorporation and deautonomization, despite the many differences of detail.

First, western monasteries, like those of the Sangha, came to provide society at large with extensive services. The major type of service was the saying of masses for the donor or deceased members of his family: Believing in the solidarity of the dead and the living, laymen were eager to enter into the *societas et fraternitas* of monastic communities for the purpose of commemorating the dead through the mediation of monks' prayers.[51] Giving a sense of the amplitude of that drive, Reichenau's *Liber memorialis,* or book of commemorative fraternity, starting from Carolingian times up to the eleventh century, contained no fewer than forty thousand names.[52] This commemorative function was developed in a particularly systematic and extensive fashion by Cluny, which also endeavored to multiply its intercessory effect by having the same anniversary and commemorative masses performed throughout all Cluniac communities at the same time. Computerized examination of all known obituaries from Cluniac monasteries, in the strictest sense of that term,[53] has now produced a list of some forty-eight thousand names of the dead.[54] Death and the afterlife, in fact, were perhaps the most important point of confluence between monks – the "dead to the world" – and society. This was also reflected in laymen's desire, beginning in the second half of the sixth century, to be buried in or near a monastery, resulting in the growth of huge cemeteries around the latter's precincts. As for the great of this world, they often managed to be buried within the walls of the monastery itself. With the increasing medieval preoccupation with death, the funerary role of monks expanded, yielding an

[51] See K. Schmid and J. Wollasch, "Die Gemeinschaft der Lebenden und Berstorbenen in Zeugnissen des Mittelalters," *Fruhmittelalterliche Studien* 1 (1967): 365–405.

[52] Wollasch, "Les obituaires," p. 143.

[53] Strictly Cluniac houses are those legally subject to Cluny, whose monks were all individually professed to the abbot Cluny. Cluny's influence, however, reached much beyond strictly Cluniac houses.

[54] See J. Wollasch, W. D. Heim, H. Mehne, F. Neiske and D. Poeck, (eds.), *Synopse der cluniacensichen Necrologien* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1982). This is a huge collective work of computerized compilation and analysis of Cluniac necrologies.

increasing number of obituaries in the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries especially, when funerary services came to play a growing part in the liturgy, and monasteries were besieged by a periphery of graves.

More collectively oriented were monks' prayers for the material and spiritual welfare of Christian kingdoms and their rulers. Monks were seen as a militant elite protecting Christian society through their heroic struggle against malevolent supernatural powers. The theme of *miles Christi*, present already in the desert tradition, where it denoted the solitary combat of the individual ascetic with evil spirits, received an additional twist, and came to be applied to the collective relation between monks and Christian society as a whole. The military imagery entailed is well conveyed in King Edgar's foundation charter for New Minster, Winchester (966):

> The abbot is armed with spiritual weapons and supported by a troop of monks anointed with the dew of heavenly graces. They fight together in the strength of Christ with the sword of the spirit against the aery wiles of the devils. They defend the king and clergy of the realm from the onslaughts of their invisible enemies.[55]

Furthermore, monasteries performed a range of variegated functions, although not always to the same extent: They served not only as necropolises but also as medieval equivalents of banks, hotels, old-age homes, and even asylums; they absorbed unmarried women of great families;[56] cared for unwanted children, as long as child oblation (allowed in Benedict's Rule) was in vogue; and provided clerical help to princes. No less important, monasteries were – at least until the emergence of the cathedral schools and the universities – the main educational and intellectual institution of Christendom.[57] In this latter function, however, they catered primarily to their own needs, to the education of oblates and novices, or the education of the nobility; only rarely – unlike the

[55] Quoted by Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, p. 225.

[56] This is far from being the only significance of the absorption of women into the monastic sector, a topic that demands fuller analysis on its own. Convents often functioned under the spiritual supervision of a monastery to which they were annexed, the few and later cases (such as the Brigittines or Fontevrault) where both men and women could come under the authority of an abbess remaining exceptions. At any rate, both convents and female recluses were no less accepted a phenomenon than their male counterparts, and the place of women in all forms of religious virtuosity (and heresy) increased from the eleventh century on and beyond the period under study in the present work. Christian monasticism's ability, in contrast with the Buddhist Sangha, to encompass both sexes, should perhaps be taken as another sign of autonomy (from extant categories of gender and kinship in this case).

[57] See J. Leclercq, *L'amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: initiation aux auteurs monastiques du Moyen-Age* (Paris: Cerf, 1957). Idem, "Il y a-t-il une culture monastique?" in *Il Monachesimo*. I do not claim to consider the (to my mind, fascinating) issue of the intellectual contribution of monasticism and the development of a specifically monastic "culture," but stress only some of the most salient institutional aspects.

Sangha – did they maintain schools serving larger sections of the laity. Monasteries also served as the depositories and guardians of saintly relics, a function that, perhaps more than any other, was of significance to all strata of medieval society, but on which they did not have the monopoly.[58] (The possession of relics can hardly be seen as a distinguishing hallmark of monasteries at a time when every church altar and many aristocratic houses could boast some relics of sorts. Relics, moreover, were highly mobile and transportable goods, easily subject to trade, theft, and forgery, by monasteries or anybody else.)[59]

There is even some similarity with the Sangha in the loss of autonomy vis-à-vis secular rulers. Besides being subordinated to episcopal control, Christian monasticism, like its Theravada Buddhist counterpart, was very much affected by the policies and fortunes of kings and emperors. Not unlike the Sangha at some stages, monasticism brought its missionary impulse to the service of the colonizing and "civilizing" aims of both empire and papacy. The missionary impetus, absent in the earlier phases of monasticism, became first and most salient among Irish monks, and received further encouragement from Pope Gregory the Great (590–604), who actively promoted the expansion, among Anglo-Saxon populations, of Benedictine monasteries intended to serve as so many centers of Christian life and instruments of Christianization.[60] A similar "civilizing" tendency asserted itself, albeit later, on the Continent as well, first with the dissemination of Irish-Frankish monasteries into the countryside under Merovingian kings in the seventh century, and the evangelization of Germanic populations by Benedictine monks in the eight century. Although popes and bishops were at first the main initiators and supporters of these trends, there is no doubt that kings remained far from indifferent to their political implications. The active role of Merovingian kings in promoting monasticism may have been in part due to sincere religious motives, but one cannot fail to note that it was also conveniently compatible with political expansion.[61] The part played by the Carolingian regime in monastic reform and uniformization has already been mentioned. Through its agency, "support of the Benedictine Rule became a feature of

[58] See for example Duby, *Age of the Cathedrals*, pp. 59–61.

[59] See P. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). The highly mobile and transportable nature of relics in Western Christendom (but not Germany, where their holiness was more tightly bound to geographical location) has been emphasized, with regard to the later centuries of the Middles Ages in particular, in L. Rothkrug, "German Holiness and Western Sanctity in Medieval and Modern History," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 15 (1988): 161–248.

[60] See M. Pacaut, *Les ordres monastiques et religieux au Moyen-Age* (Paris: F. Nathan, 1970), ch. 4.

[61] See Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 177–8.

central government."[62] The spread and imposition of Benedictine monasticism at the expense of older Irish-Frankish and Gallo-Roman forms actually became a measure of the growing Carolingian control in the Frankish world.[63] Moreover, the monasticism favored by Charlemagne was not contemplative and withdrawn, but expected to be "useful" and contribute its share to the Carolingian renaissance.[64] This entailed, among other things, a great expansion in monasteries' scholarly and educational activities, both within the monastery proper and in "external" schools where monks would come to teach, at the expense of the more traditional emphasis on work and prayer – again emphasizing the role of monasteries as centers of culture and civilization.

All this, obviously, was a far cry from the original flight into the desert by individuals in search of their own religious salvation. What the trends just described denote is a social involvement and "functionalization" (in the sense explained in Chapter 2) of the monastic institution different in many aspects from the Sangha's, but certainly no weaker, and in some respects even more systematic and thorough.

Monasticism and royalty

One might see a further similarity with the Theravada Buddhist case in that here too a pattern of interaction that obtained on a microsocial level with individual laymen was "stretched" with little modification to the macrosocietal level, to the interaction with kings as rulers of society. Nevertheless, the relative importance and meaning of the relationship at this level was very different from the one it achieved in Southeast Asia. First, as already announced by the doctrinal–ideological differences in this regard, the relationship fundamentally remained one of explicit exchange, involving both material and symbolic resources on both sides. In fact, it was so explicit and reciprocal that it tended to assume the character of an economic transaction corresponding to a functional division of labor, hence vulnerable to changes in the balance and "fair" reciprocity of the exchange. Second, Christian monarchs never became as dependent on their relationship to the monastic sector as did Buddhist kings. To begin with, the existence of a secular clergy provided an alternative source of religious absolution and legitimization. Most impor-

[62] Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, p. 218.

[63] See Geary, *Before France and Germany*, pp. 215–17.

[64] See Pacaut, *Les ordres*, pp. 46 ff. Benedict of Aniane's reform meant to reemphasize withdrawal from the world (and its concomitant prayer) in the definition of the monastic vocation through a more uniform enforcement of the Benedictine Rule. This itself was made possible and promoted by the support of a ruler, Louis the Pious, who was more sympathetic to the contemplative aims of monasticism than his father, Charlemagne.

tantly, however, their own sacral legitimacy (stemming partly from pre-Christian Germanic traditions) was in some important respects stronger and more autonomous than that of the Buddhist kings. Kingship in Christendom was strengthened and stabilized by the principle of royal dynasties and blood lineage, in contrast with the weakness of ascriptive principles in Theravada, where kings had to prove their karmic merit and personal charisma. Further weakening the king's dependence on legitimization by religious authorities was the notion of the king's direct election by God, which the Church only comes to confirm. This the Church had no problem doing, willing as it was to recognize that "all power is of God," as long as its own ultimate superiority was acknowledged. In fact, however, this was not always the case. Kings also perceived themselves in roles that could only clash with the Church's conception of its own supremacy. If they did not view themselves as priests (the king-priest, or *rex sacerdos,* rooted in the tradition of Melchisedek, had no powerful offshoot in Western Christianity), they did consider themselves at least as supreme among the *oratores.* A last dimension in the symbolics of sacral kingship were the supernatural powers of the "*rois thaumaturges,*" so brilliantly expounded by Marc Bloch.[65] This, however, was a later phenomenon, that appeared only in the twelfth century, and was perhaps symptomatic of the resurgence of royal power after a temporary decline in the tenth.

Especially telling, from this point of view, is the special relationship that developed between monarchy and certain royal monasteries, such as Fleury or Saint Denis, where kings had themselves buried and kept the symbols of their royal power, and upon which they lavished their benefactions and personal interest. First launched under the reign of the Merovingian king Dagobert I (629–38),[66] the special connection between Saint Denis and royal power culminated under the direction of the abbot Suger (1122–51), who was propelled to the summit of political influence through his long personal friendship with Louis VI, and remained a principal counselor to Louis VII, in whose absence he actually governed the realm of France for two years (1147–9). The point, however, is that these select monasteries became strongholds of royal cults and ideology, developing the praise of the monarch to an extent unknown even in the capital monasteries of the Theravada Buddhist setting.[67] Indeed, this special relationship between the monarchy and the monastic sector – or more precisely, specific, prestigious monasteries – must be placed within the

[65] M. Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* (Paris: Albin, 1961).

[66] Dagobert was the first to endow Saint-Denis with enormous amounts of land and wealth – and expect from it the perpetual offering of prayers for the king, his family and his kingdom. See Geary, *Before France and Germany,* p. 167.

[67] See Duby, *Age of the Cathedrals,* especially pp. 97 ff.

context of the perpetual struggle between religious and secular authorities in medieval Europe. The tendency of kings to turn to monasteries might be interpreted as a way in which they preserved a "window on the sacred" and an important basis of legitimacy – a pattern replicated by the lesser nobility. This relationship also had the advantage of not being as burdened by comprehensive political implications as relationships with the secular ecclesiastical hierarchy. Admittedly, this special tie between kings and monasteries was more than counterbalanced by the tendency of important parts of the monastic sector to develop allegiance to Rome rather than to local church authorities and national kings.[68] Nevertheless, it still may be taken as the epitome of Christian monasticism's potential for social involvement and incorporation, despite its no-less-real and impressive institutional autonomy.

Monasticism and social elites

A crucial characteristic of Christian monasticism's social incorporation, alluded to earlier, was the development of an especially tight and manifold (if never exclusive) connection to the nobility and to social elites in general.[69] This presents an important contrast with the Sangha, where the major factor of "domestication" was the grass-roots embedment within a local and weakly stratified village laity, with no special linkage to higher strata. (Here again, Sri Lanka was the deviant case, coming closer to the Western situation, with a society that was caste-stratified – albeit much less rigidly than the Indian caste system – and where recruitment to the Sangha was very early limited to the highest caste.)

This connection between Christian monasticism and the social elites had many expressions: Nobles – oblates and other recruits – accounted for a large share of the monastic population and were predominant among its leadership;[70] some monasteries even became reserved for the

[68] There were, however, significant geographical and historical variations in these tendencies. The *Regularis Concordia* (c. 970), for example, shows English monasticism to have a distinctive, even intimate connection with British monarchy and national identity. See Knowles, *Monastic Order in England,* pp. 44–6.

[69] See F. Prinz, "Mönchtum und Frühmittelalterliche Adelgesellschaft im Spiegel der Hagiographie," in *Askese und Kulture,* pp. 75–86; J. Wollasch, "Parenté noble et monachisme réformateur: observation sur les 'conversions' à la vie monastique aux XIe et XIIe siecles," *Revue Historique* 535 (1980): 3–24.

[70] This was already the case in pre-Columbian Merovingian monasticism: "Abbots and bishops were members of a highly cultured elite, joined together by education and above all by the bonds of *amicitia.* Although members of the most significant aristocratic families tended to look to episcopal rather than abbatial office, no hard and fast line can be drawn between the bishops and abbots of this period with respect to their social origins or their cultural attainments." See I. Wood, "A Prelude to Columbanus: The Monastic Achievement in the Burgundian Territories," in H. B. Clarke and M. Brennan (eds.), *Columbanus and*

nobility though in theory monasteries were open to all classes; monasteries were founded and supported through noble patronage; and many of monasticism's social functions and services were particularly and sometimes even exclusively oriented toward the nobility. This was true even of the function of intercessory prayer, since it was customary for noble families to offer very young children to a monastery where they could then pray all their lives for the salvation of their relatives, who remained in the world.[71] Monastic "external" education chiefly involved children from elevated backgrounds, and at least before the great apostolic revival, women's monasteries catered mostly to women of noble backgrounds. It came to be taken for granted that monasticism would be able to provide its members of elevated social origins with the aristocratic standards of living they were accustomed to, despite the obvious contradiction with ascetic ideals of renunciation; this was one of the most significant factors in the eventual corruption of monastic ideals.[72]

Irish monasticism may have played a crucial role in the early establishment of this relation to the aristocratic elites. According to Prinz,[73] the Columbian missionary wave had the effect of detaching monasticism from its previous urban episcopal connection (itself contrary to its original antiurban character), leading it to the countryside, where it took on the form of aristocratic or royal monasteries with manorial organization.[74] Moreover, the spectacular success of Columbanus was mainly determined, in Prinz's view, by close personal connections with the Frankish aristocracy: Outstanding pupils at Luxeuil were influential aristocrats and officeholders at the Merovingian court who, precisely because of their old political connections, could do much for the material advancement of monasteries.[75]

It seems possible to extend this idea beyond the Merovingian era and apply it to the close relations of both Cluniacs and Cistercians with the

Merovingian Monasticism (Oxford: B.A.R., 1981), p. 5. Furthermore, noble ascetics did not necessarily disconnect themselves from their kinship ties: first, they did not stray too far from civilization, and often journeyed to the marginal land just within or slightly beyond the boundaries of the family estate. Wood also notes that saints who had begun by dissociating themselves entirely from their families came into closer contact with their relatives once sanctity was achieved; the break from secular ties of a family was thus followed by religious influence that worked through family connections (p. 8).

71 Duby, *Age of Cathedrals*, p. 59.

72 The role played by infant oblation in this trend has already been mentioned.

73 F. Prinz, "Columbanus, the Frankish Nobility and the Territories East of the Rhine," in Clark and Brennan, *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism*, pp. 73–90.

74 Prinz also perceives here the influence of the Irish monastic church, with its close interrelation of political and monastic structures: The office of abbot was handed down in the family of the original founder, who in his turn was frequently the head of the tribe or a member of the ruling circle.

75 See also Geary, *Before France and Germany*, pp. 171–8 especially.

aristocratic classes.[76] In general, monasticism appears to be very much an "elite game." In this game, the nobility played a prominent part, and royal dynasties developed close associations with specific monasteries. It was not infrequent for kings (most notably Robert and Louis the Pious in France, or Edward the Confessor and Henry III in England) to display monastic inclinations. Kings often kept monks in their entourage and in some cases even abdicated the crown in order to adopt the monastic life.[77] In the case of Louis the Pious, for one, Benedictine notions of the abbot's authority and accountability to God for the soul of his brethren may have even shaped conceptions of imperial rule and responsibility.[78] Abbots, on the other hand, developed close connections with the highest secular and clerical elites. Many popes and bishops came from a monastic background; not infrequently they maintained the custom of periods of monastic or even eremitic retreat. Saint Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, born to a knightly family, is the prime example, as he was not only the spiritual leader of the Cistercian order but also powerful enough to influence the fate of popes and even Christendom as a whole in his time.

This relationship with the social elites favored the easy access by Christian monasticism to political power through a network of connections to the very highest echelons of both the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, the connection between monasticism and nobility is also of a more intrinsic and not merely "political" nature. Underlying it was the widespread belief in a deep and necessary kinship between noble blood and virtue (also evident in the social background and definition of medieval sainthood),[79] that could have no equivalent in the Theravada Buddhist context. Moreover, the relationship was accompa-

[76] Cluny mainly spread at first in regions where kingship was weakest, and through connection to local powerful lords and princes.

[77] See C. Stancliffe, "Kings who Opted Out," in P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins (eds.), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983), pp. 155–76. Stancliffe studied a wave, starting in England in the sixth and seventh centuries and peaking in the last quarter of the eighth century, of kings who voluntarily abdicated for the sake of religious life (either entering a monastery or going on an extended pilgrimage). This pattern seems, however, to be unique to England and to have little equivalent on the Continent in the same period. It corresponds, in Stancliffe's view, to a peak in the prestige of monasticism under the influence of Irish spirituality, not counterbalanced by a strong-enough conception of Christian kingship. On the Continent, by contrast, both clergy and kings, perhaps in a continuity of Greco-Roman orientations to the political arena, carried a more positive conception of kingship in general and of the potential contribution of Christian kingship in promoting Christianity. Joining the monastic life could also be, however, an honorable way of stepping down when a king's position, for whatever reason, became untenable.

[78] T. F. X. Noble, "The Monastic Idea as a Model for Empire: The Case of Louis the Pious," *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976): 235–50.

[79] A. Vauchez, "Beata stirps: sainteté et lignage en Occident," in G. Duby and J. Le Goff (eds.), *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval* (Rome: Ecole Française, 1977).

nied by mutual influence and even interpretation at the ideological level – aristocratic values, in their historical variants, affecting monastic spirituality, which itself played an important role in the evolution of these same values – in a complex, dialectical process that exceeds the scope of the present discussion.[80]

The association with social elites through networks of kinship, friendship, and political and ideological influence could work in two seemingly opposite directions: It functioned as perhaps the most important factor of monastic incorporation and deautonomization, but was no less important in sustaining a monastic impact on the external environment very different from that of the Sangha. A number of aspects of monks' interaction with wider society not found in the Theravada context highlight a pattern of forceful interpenetration, mutual impingement, or even competition between monasticism and other groups and social sectors; a more forceful, even if not necessarily direct, political involvement; and a far-reaching ascetic influence on society at large, loaded with innovative and even "transformative" implications.

Monasticism and the secular clergy

Rather than remaining confined to a clear-cut definition of its vocation, monasticism tended in time to encompass many religious and secular functions otherwise differentiated in Christian society at large. In particular, monasticism often penetrated domains of activity normally reserved for the secular clergy – for example, administering some of the sacraments and even providing entire parishes with full-fledged *cura animarum* indistinguishable from that provided by the secular clergy. This was partly a result of the multivocality of the monastic ideal itself oscillating between its more and less socially involved orientations – which prevented it from remaining as clearly segregated and confined to specific domains of activity as the Sangha – and partly because of the increasing role of liturgy in monastic life. In fact, only two features clearly distinguished monks from priests, at least institutionally: Priests were not devoted to the search for Christian perfection, their primary function being to administer sacraments and the *cura animarum;* though clearly distinct from laymen, priests were not committed to seclusion and to the type of segregation from society that goes along with it.

One might have thought that Church and monastery would eventually settle into clear-cut differentiated roles – monks totally devoting them-

[80] This process of mutual impingement is finely suggested, with regard to the relation between Irish monasticism and Frankish aristocracy in Geary, *Before France and Germany*, pp. 171 ff.; and with regard to Cistercian spirituality in Duby, St. Bernard et l'art cistercien, pp. 149 ff.

selves to a perfect imitation of Christ and the search for individual salvation, whereas priests would handle the *vita activa,* the distribution of sacraments, and the *cura animarum.* Yet the history of the relation between monks and priests is one of constant interpenetration and even competition in most of these areas. This combination of interpenetration and competition was already present in the early, less-differentiated stages. Starting as a lay perfectionist movement in flight from a Christianity it saw as increasingly corrupted by worldliness, monasticism was ultimately at odds with the clergy of which it implied a basic criticism, even if it never actually rejected its authority.[81] At the same time, the Church found it hard not to welcome the tendency of monasticism to expand into originally extramonastic spheres of activity in times when the secular clergy was often corrupt and illiterate, and hence less efficient in serving the Christianizing and expansionist endeavors of both Church and empire. By the ninth century, many monks (assessments range from a quarter to a half) were also ordained priests. Following Benedict of Aniane's reform, the liturgical function acquired increasing centrality in monastic life, and even became a dominant feature in the Cluniac order from the tenth century on. As for the clergy, it developed a type of *vita mixta* in the order of regular canons – priests taking upon themselves a common life and other elements typical of the monastic life. Popes themselves frequently came from a monastic background.

The Gregorian reform, to be later discussed in greater detail, is especially significant from the point of view of the relation between regular and secular clergy. Commonly considered to stretch from the Council of Rheims (1049) to the first Lateran Council (1123) but owing its name to Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), who was one of its chief exponents, the Gregorian project involved, among other things, the attempt to reassert the cleavage between clergy and laity – a cleavage that had been much weakened by the corrupting influence of simony (the sale and purchase of church offices), lay investiture (lay prerogatives in the selection and ordination of clergymen), nicolaism (the marriage of priests), and generally low standards of priesthood. This reforming policy, moreover, has to be understood as part and parcel of the Gregorians' intent to promote papal supremacy within the church and even within Christendom at large.[82] A crucial aspect of Gregorian

[81] See Bitterman, "The Beginning of the Struggle between the Regular and the Secular Clergy," pp. 19–26.

[82] The literature on the Gregorian era is voluminous and still growing. See among the more contemporary works, Tellenbach, *Church, State and Society;* N. F. Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture in England, 1089–1135* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958); Cowdrey, *Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform;* K. Morrison, "The Gregorian Reform," in McGinn et al. (eds.), *Christian Spirituality,* pp. 177–93.

policy, at any rate, was the attempt to enforce celibacy as well as higher standards of morality, knowledge, and spirituality, or in other words, to "monachize" the clergy.[83] With these aims in mind, a succession of Gregorian popes also developed a close partnership – the precise nature of which has been much debated by historians – with important parts of the monastic sector and Cluny in particular.[84] In a later phase, however, the papacy attempted to reestablish a clearer distinction between monks and priests, and switched to favoring the more withdrawn monastic orders, whose vocation was more clearly distinct from that of the secular clergy.

The emergence of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century further complicated the picture, since these explicitly took upon themselves the activity of preaching and hearing confession, until then the preserve of the secular clergy. These multiple trends of mutual interpenetration and competition were accompanied by much struggle and antagonism – monks proving to be no less polemical than the others – that especially intensified from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries with the increasing differentiation of the monastic sector, the emergence of various types of canons, and finally, the appearance of the friars and their own orders.[85] The laity itself may be said to have joined this area of competition over the same period, developing new forms of religious expression (at times heretical and often anticlerical), and giving rise to a whole range of groups and organizations (such as penitential groups, popular movements, lay fraternities, or lay orders) that, albeit often monastically inspired in spiritual orientation, increasingly operated outside and independently of the monastic and mendicant sectors.[86]

[83] See, for example, Morrison, "Gregorian Reform," p. 188 ff.

[84] The literature on the relation of Cluny and other reformed monastic branches to the various phases and aspects of the Gregorian project is extensive and rife with controversies. The earlier historical stance that tended to see the Gregorian reform as a direct outgrowth of Cluny's reform has now been long superseded by a much more complex analysis of the various forces at work in the Gregorian reform and of an only temporary convergence, or even superficial compatibility between monastic and papal aims. This is especially emphasized in H. J. White, "The Gregorian Ideal and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960): 321–48; also Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society,* especially pp. 186 ff; Cowdrey, *Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform;* idem, "Cluny and the First Crusade," *Revue Bénédictine* 23 (1973): 285–311.

[85] See especially M. D. Chenu, "Monks, Canons and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life in idem, *Nature, Man, Society: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); E. W. McDonnel, "The Vita Apostolica: Diversity or Dissent?", *Church History* 24 (1955): 15–31; G. Constable, "The Diversity of Religious Life and Acceptance of Social Pluralism in the Twelfth Century," in McGinn et al. (eds.), *Christian Spirituality,* pp. 29–47.

[86] For the gradual development of a distinctive spirituality of the laity in the first millenium, see J. Fontaine, "The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the

Monasticism and political power

From a more specifically "political" perspective, that is, focusing on issues of control, power and authority, monasticism came to hold a great deal of power in a competitive social arena. Worldly political involvement was to be avoided by those who had opted for monastic seclusion from a world they despised. Monks never became as fully autonomous a political force as the secular hierarchy and the papacy, to which they always remained subordinate in one way or another. Their impact, like the Sangha's, most often operated indirectly and informally. There are, however, basic differences between the two: First, monasticism simply commanded greater coalitional power in the perennial clashes between kings and church, empire and papacy, nobles and kings, and nobles among themselves – all competing to draw monasteries into their respective spheres of influence to boost their own power and legitimacy; second, the manifold network of connection to the elites, already described, ensured rapid access to effective foci of institutional authority; third, the existence of the Church itself, of which monasticism was a part and that it never altogether rejected, provided monks with a religious institution in the world to which they could return and in which they could even assume leadership once clad with the prestige of their previous ascetic seclusion.

These various aspects of monks' political involvement reflect the vertical principle that made monasticism essentially consonant with, rather than antithetical to, authority and power (be it secular or religious), and thus much better equipped for struggles in the political sphere. This may already be discerned in the formative stages of the ascetic movement: The intense concern with issues of authority, the appeal of spiritual ascetic authority inside and outside the monastic milieu, and the oscillation between retreat to the desert and the return to positions of institutional power (giving rise to the somewhat paradoxical figure of the monk-bishop in fifth-century Gaul), were all in tune with later developments.[87] As Bowersock has emphasized, the ability to create a new and characteristic form of institutional authority at that stage may have given Christianity a definite edge over competing contemporary intellectual and soteriological movements. The adherents of the latter might opt out of ordinary life for some sort of with-

Laity," in McGinn et al. (eds.), *Christian Spirituality,* pp. 453–91. On the increasing religious activization of the laity as such from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, see Chenu, "Monks, Canons and Laymen; J. R. Strayer, "The Laicization of French and English Society in the Thirteenth Century," in S. Thrupp (ed.), *Change in Medieval Society* (New York: Appleton, Century & Crofts, 1964), pp. 103–16.

[87] Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church.*

drawn and even eremitic life – a common mark of the philosophic life among various schools at the time – and even become close friends or advisors of secular rulers. But they did not combine ascetic withdrawal and institutional authority, a revolutionary and effective combination to be found time and again in later stages of Christian history.[88] Significantly, however, political involvement was never the domain of entire monasteries or orders, but only of abbots – responsible for the monastery's interaction with the external world, and clearly differentiated from other members of the community in this function – frequently traveling and entertaining guests from the outside world (within the monastery, but on distinct premises) and disposing of a budget kept distinct from the monastic budget proper. Furthermore, political influence usually affirmed itself not as a routine, taken-for-granted property of the monastic institution as such or of abbots in general, but only through monastic leaders of outstanding personality – such as Wala of Corbie, Suger of Saint Denis, or Bernard of Clairvaux – and not without reservations and dilemmas for both the abbots themselves and their communities.[89]

Religious and cultural impact

On the whole, monastic political behavior remained within the established rules of the game and showed little innovative or radical potential before the eleventh century. However, monasticism also exerted a significant religious and cultural, rather than specifically political, impact upon society at large, one increasingly loaded, at least up to the thirteenth century, with dynamic and innovative potential for Christian society. Throughout the period under study, there was a significant and increasing diffusion of monastic standards of spirituality into other sectors of Christian society, both lay and clerical. This was especially evident in the increasingly elaborate patterns of penitence, originally adopted from the monastic world;[90] the gradual enforcement of priestly celibacy;[91] the emergence in the tenth century of ideals of lay sanctity fed by monastic

[88] G. Bowersock, "Architects of Competing Transcendental Visions in Late Antiquity," in S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *The Origins and Diversity of the Axial Age Civilizations* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1986); Drijvers, "Askese und Monchtum," pp. 444–65.

[89] See H. Mayr-Haring, "Two Abbots in Politics: Wala of Corbie and Bernard of Clairvaux," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5, no. 40 (1990): 217–37.

[90] C. Vogel, *La discipline pénitentielle en Gaule des origines à la fin du VIIe siecle* (Paris: Letouzoy et Aré 1952); N. T. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

[91] H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church* (London: Watts, 1932).

models and criteria – as in Odo's biography of Count Gerald of Aurillac (d. 909);[92] the incorporation of lay brothers into the monastic community, followed later by the formation of lay third orders; and the strong ascetic tendencies of lay religious movements, some of which were subsequently condemned as heretical (the Cathars, Arnoldians, Patarins, and Waldensians).[93] Knighthood itself is often analyzed nowadays as entailing, at some stage of its development, a strong element of "monastization of the warrior,"[94] in what is clearly a case of ideological cross-fertilization, since knightly values also penetrated the monastic world, leading to a merger of the two ideals in the Order of the Templars, initially supported by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.[95] As already mentioned, a number of kings were clearly influenced by monastic values (Robert, Louis the Pious, Edward the Confessor, and Henry III) or had abbots among their closest friends and counselors (Alcuin with Charlemagne; Benedict of Aniane with Louis the Pious; and Lanfranc with William the Conqueror being the most famous examples).

Only with the movement of the Peace of God, which began in 989, can one discern a shift toward a more directly active role for monks in the "ascetic shaping" of their social environment. At stake in this movement was the attempt to reinstate a degree of peace and safety in areas where the decline of the monarchy left widespread disorder and warfare, and to provide protection not only for church property but also for the poor from the violence of lords, knights, and *milites* of all sorts.[96] Monks

[92] See J. C. Poulin, *L'idéal de sainteté dans l'Aquitaine carolingienne d'après les sources hagiographiques 750–950* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971).

[93] H. Gründmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961); T. Manteuffel, *Naissance d'une hérésie: les adeptes de la pauvreté volontaire au Moyen-Age* (Paris: Mouton, 1970); M. D. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (London: Arnold, 1977). The Cathars are especially interesting from this point of view, since they also propounded the distinction and double standard between an ascetic elite and average believers (*perfecti* and *credentes*) taken over from the Manichean tradition.

[94] See, for example, G. Duby, "The Origins of Knighthood," in idem, *The Chivalrous Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 158–67.

[95] Cistercian monasticism itself is infused with religiously transposed knightly values. See Bernard of Clairvaux, "In Praise of the New Knighthood," pp. 125–68 in idem, *Treatises III* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1977), and the introduction by R. J. Z. Werblowsky; also Duby, *Saint Bernard: l'art cistercien,* pp. 77–82, 150 ff. A variant of this thesis of the transmutation of knightly orientations has even been applied to Benedictine monasticism in general. See B. H. Rosenwein and L. K. Little, "Social Meaning in Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities," *Past and Present* 63 (1974): especially 15.

[96] See J. P. Poly and E. Bournazel, *La mutation féodale, Xe–XIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), pp. 251 ff.; H. E. J. Cowdrey, "The Peace of God and the Truce of God in the Eleventh Century," *Past and Present* 46 (1970): 42–67; G. Duby, "Laity and the Peace of God," in idem, *Chivalrous Society,* pp. 123–33.

played a prominent role in the great assemblies convened with the aim of committing the *bellatores* to peace, first through a general, overly ambitious attempt to contain violence by the threat of excommunication, later by the more partial (but more effective) banning of violence on specific days of the week. Cluny in particular threw all its authority behind the movement; Odo of Cluny's *Life* of Gerard d'Aurillac, already mentioned, undoubtedly played an important part in the emergence of a new ideal of Christian knighthood, promoting the (very impractical) image of a lay lord imbued with monastic ideals of abstinence and dedicated to nonviolence and the protection of Church and poor.[97] The authors of the peace initiative, however, also included the bishops, some of whom were in fact indignant at monks' emerging from their monasteries to interfere in worldly matters and assume functions of social control reserved for kings and bishops.

Not unrelated to the widespread millenarian belief in the imminence of the Second Coming around the end of the tenth century, the monastic ideal reached what was probably the climax of its prestige and influence in the eleventh, when the Church increasingly advocated higher (and thus closer to monastic) standards of poverty and chastity not only for the clergy but for all Christians.[98] This trend culminated during the Gregorian period, which at least in its early stages, as already noted, provided the monastic-ascetic ideal with broad institutional and political backing.[99] Some have been tempted to see this period as a revolutionary turning point in the history of Western civilization, as important as the Reformation itself.[100] In this vein, one is even reminded, indeed, of Luther's later attempt to "turn the world into a huge monastery."[101] The analogy, however, should not be exaggerated: Modern historians are now careful to distinguish between various phases of the Gregorian era and to emphasize that the intentions of abbots and popes, even at times of close collaboration, did not necessarily coincide.[102] Even in the case of Cluny, whose autonomy from local feudal interference and total subservience to the papacy were understood by a succession of Gregorian popes as the model of true ecclesiastic "*libertas*," it may be more precise to talk of a broad compatibility rather than tight identification of monastic and papal objec-

[97] See Duby, *Chivalrous Society*, pp. 166–7.
[98] The thesis of a connection between eschatological fervor and the diffusion of monastic ideals into Christian society at large is especially propounded by Georges Duby. See for example, *Age of Cathedrals*, pp. 57–8.
[99] See this chapter, fn. 82.
[100] See, for example, N. F. Cantor, "The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050–1130," *American Historical Review* 67 (1960): 55; useful as an introduction to alternative interpretations, see S. Williams (ed.), *The Gregorian Epoch: Reformation, Revolution, Reaction?* (Boston: Heath, 1964)
[101] See Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, pp. 153–4.
[102] See this chapter, fn. 84.

tives. Although also concerned with impressing higher standards of religious life on both clergy and laity, Cluniac abbots were on the whole less virulently in conflict with their feudal environment, and ultimately gave priority to monastic goals proper rather than aim at a radical restructuring of Christian society as a whole.[103] As for the papacy itself, its overriding, ultimate aim was, rather, imposing Roman spiritual and temporal primacy (papal "monarchialism" or "theocracy")[104] and consolidating the sacerdotal hierarchy, than promoting ascetic ideals proper. In fact, the Gregorian reform may even be understood, using Tellenbach's nomenclature, as an attempt to try to substitute the sacerdotal–sacramental for the monastic–ascetic hierarchy of values.[105] Be that as it may, this era offers a forceful example of the tremendous impact of monasticism upon the entire structure of Christian society at a crucial stage of the confrontation between religious and secular authorities: The alliance between monasticism and papacy reached its peak here in the attempt to impose a maximal overlap between Church and society, through the subordination and desacralization of secular authorities, the systematic attack on lay interference in ecclesiastic matters, and the general raising of Christian standards of behavior for all. This alliance and the systematic attempt, in at least some phases of the Gregorian era, to spread the ascetic impulse beyond the walls of the monastery itself represent a phenomenon unknown in the history of Theravada monasticism. It is also important to note that the Gregorian reform, in its first stage at least, drew much of its inspiration and leadership not only from Cluny, but also from the new wave of eremitic and semieremitic reform movements within the monastic world itself. It is remarkable indeed that a leading eremitic figure such as Peter Damian could become a part of these far-reaching political processes, being induced to join the reform effort and propelled for this purpose to the very apex of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[106]

It should be obvious that the political and cultural impact of monasticism just analyzed could not but help blur the boundaries between the

[103] For a detailed analysis of the relation between Cluny and the Gregorians, see Cowdrey, *Cluniacs and the Gregorian Reform*. Comparing their respective objectives, especially see pp. 121–56.

[104] See Lemarignier, *La France médiévale*, p. 211. Lemarignier himself prefers the label "papal theocracy." Using rather "papal monarchialism," see, e.g., White, "Gregorian Ideal," p. 324.

[105] See White, "Gregorian Ideal," pp. 324 ff.

[106] See J. Leclercq, *Pierre Damien, ermite et homme d'église* (Rome: Storia e Letteretura, 1960); B. Hamilton, "Saint Pierre Damien et les mouvements monastiques de son temps," in *Monastic Reform, Catharism and the Crusades* (London: Variorum, 1979), pp. 177–202; Little, L. K., "The Personal Development of Peter Damiani," in W. C. Jordan, B. M. Nob, and T. F. Ruiz, *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of J. R. Strayer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 317–42. Damien, it must be noted, was not hostile to Cluny.

monastic and other social sectors and contradict the ideological–theological model of a neat division of labor and segregation between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi described earlier. It must be stressed, however, that whatever "active" influence monasticism had upon its social surroundings was usually facilitated, supported, and channeled through the ecclesiastical authorities, in relation to whom the monastic leadership generally retained the conservative "vertical" stance already mentioned. It is only with the advent of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, signaling the waning of the Gregorian impetus, that one may speak of a more autonomous and "charismatic" anti-institutional impetus in the interaction between monasticism and society at large.

What Bernard of Clairvaux represents is not so much the fluid translation of monastic, ascetic prestige into institutional power through access to the highest levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as the combination of ascetic prestige and political power within one stormy individual, independently of and eventually against the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Bernard did not hesitate to interfere in the choice of a pope at the time of the double election of Anacletus II and Innocent II and the consequent schism of 1130 – heavily sponsoring the candidate of his choice irrespective of curial considerations of procedural regularity. This interference entailed "the assumption that a disputed papal election might be adjudicated by an abbot, no matter how great his sanctity, in itself evidence of the waning prestige of Gregorianism . . . a tacit admission that both official and charismatic power now resided elsewhere than in Rome."[107] What Bernard brought to this involvement was not only his specific personal influence, however, but an alternative, charismatic ideology of religious leadership.[108] For Bernard, in White's words,

> the hierocracy constructed by the Gregorians must yield in all matters of universal importance to the general will of the community of believers led and taught by the monk. Ultimate authority resides not in sacerdotal hierarchy, but in spiritual hierarchy. . . . For the first time since the election of Leo IX a pope was created, not in Rome, but in the provinces, by the representatives of the popular morality and in conformity to the charismatic idea of religious leadership.[109]

Later, Bernard even attempted to translate monastic ascetic values into a viable principle of hierarchical leadership. In this view, not unlike that of Peter Damian, "the true leader becomes a spiritual teacher not trained in dialectic, law, arms, diplomacy, but humility, charity, contemplation," and the pope is transformed "from a figurehead of the sacerdotal hierar-

[107] White, "Gregorian Ideal," p. 337.
[108] See also Mayr-Harting, "Two Abbots in Politics," pp. 231–7.
[109] White, "Gregorian Ideal," p. 339. Knowles cautions, however, against overinflating Saint Bernard's role.

chy into the true leader of the community of saints."[110] Such a conception could not but clash with (and was in fact partly a reaction to) the recent development of canon law and the enhanced emphasis on legalism, both inside and outside the ecclesiastical institution.

The following decades saw a return of monasticism to the more classical confines of its withdrawn vocation. The papacy itself came to favor those orders most committed to withdrawal and contemplation. By starting to grant plenary indulgences from 1300 on (a custom first launched by Boniface VIII), the papacy also contributed to undermining the need for monks' intercession in the remission of sins and salvational process. More generally, the increasing secularization of the state and secular power as such (greatly desacralized by the Gregorian era itself), now increasingly independent from the Church and from religious legitimacy in general, implied an overall decline of monastic political influence. These trends could not but further weaken monasticism's resources in its relations of exchange with society at large, already undermined by the convergence, in the twelfth century, of broad economic, social, and cultural changes unfavorable to the classic pattern of interaction between virtuosi and society.

An important aspect of this period of massive social and cultural change is the emergence of new urban and commercial strata as a result of the increasingly market- and money-oriented economy, and of accelerated urbanization – itself implying the emergence of new types of wealth as well as of poverty. But no less crucial was the advent of new types of nonmonastic, secular cultural elites and institutions (first cathedral schools and then universities) that undermined the monks' long-standing monopoly as carriers and transmitters of the West's intellectual-cultural traditions.

Another major feature of this era is the tremendous differentiation within the virtuoso sector itself, challenging and overflowing the classical monastic forms of virtuosity, as is explained in greater detail in the next chapter. It is often argued that traditional Benedictine monasticism was well-adapted to the Carolingian system and to agrarian and feudal structures, whereas mendicant spirituality corresponded to the development of new urban needs. The relationship between religious and social-structural differentiation has become a historiographical commonplace:

> For several centuries, until nearly the end of the eleventh century, the tendency had been to develop an ever-greater degree of identity of purpose and organization, and to delight in the unity of an achieved ideal. Then, within little more than a hundred years, all the main varieties of medieval religious organization came into existence. We shall certainly not be wrong in associating the stability of religious ideals before about 1100 with the relatively static society of the early

[110] Ibid., p. 344.

Middle Ages, and the rapid diversification of religious organization after this date with the expansion and growing complexity of western society.[111]

In contrast to the overall stability of the virtuoso–society relational structure in the Theravada Buddhism setting, the overriding characteristic of the relationship of Christian monasticism to its macrosocietal context would seem to be one of plasticity and progressive internal differentiation, favored by and responding to changes in the wider environment. This partially explains the greater similarity between the two cases in the earlier stage. In the first stage, monasticism interacted with a more static and less differentiated environment. The similarity with traditional Theravada Buddhism is also enhanced by the fact that Church and state constituted relatively weaker macrosocietal frameworks at that stage, undergoing increasing fragmentation in the era of feudalism; in addition, monasticism had then to interact and compete with fewer alternative elites, and even represented, like the Sangha, the only effective cultural–ideological elite.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the relationship with the environment is not simply one of direct reflection. The element of *antithesis* – what we called in the Introduction "alternative structure" – remained and accompanied these drastic transformations. Rosenwein and Little, examining what they see as the close relations between Cluniac and mendicant spirituality and the dominant orientations of their respective historical sociocultural environment, emphasize the element not only of extension and reflection, but also that of antithetic, dialectical transposition: Cluniac patience and prayer, in this view, were part of a complex of responses to feudal warfare, whereas mendicant poverty and preaching were one of a number of related responses to urban money making.[112]

[111] Southern, *Western Society and the Church*, p. 215.

[112] See Rosenwein and Little, "Social Meaning," p. 31: "The religious life of the friars, like that of the monks before them, involved the Christianizing of an activity that had been seen as wholly exploitative and therefore morally unacceptable. In both instances this activity was the occupation of the dominant class of a sector of society. In urban society, dominated by merchants and professionals, money making had been condemned, while in feudal society, dominated by knights, lay violence had been unacceptable.

"The spiritualities that responded to these conditions did so, on one level, by repudiating the unacceptable activities; the friars rejected money; the monks abandoned the battle field. But on a second level, the response . . . developed spiritualities that in themselves suggested a way to separate out the useful aspects from the exploitative ones. The monks fought spiritual battles without shedding blood, thus exercising violence as truly Christian knights. The friars negotiated the Gospel without using money, thus exercising commerce as truly Christian merchants." A similar element of "antithetic reflection" in the relation between virtuosity and its environment is emphasized by Duby, *Age of the Cathedrals*, p. 118.

This tendency of religious virtuosity to link up dialectically with whatever strata or institutions are dominant is rooted in the fact that these dominant groups and institutions were not only foci of economic or organizational power, but themselves also possessed a high degree of ideological–symbolic autonomy. As suggested before, although hierarchization was certainly a pervasive organizational device in medieval society, it could evolve along a number of competing and potentially conflicting principles or axes. The greater ideological strength and autonomy of monarchy and aristocracy in particular have been stressed. In general, one of the overriding characteristics of Christian monasticism's macrosocietal environment, especially when contrasted with the Theravada case, is the existence of a plurality of foci of authority, both secular and religious, often competing over and interfering in each other's domains of influence, with only occasional periods of clear-cut division of labor and complementarity. Furthermore, their interaction and confrontation could take place not only at the level of king and national Church, but also on the broader macrosocietal scope of empire and Papacy, as in the Carolingian and Gregorian eras, or on a smaller local scale, between kings or princes and local bishops.

Three implications for monasticism need to be stressed here. First, monasticism was constantly caught up in a shifting network of alliances, seeking protection and providing support in a rather opportunistic fashion, according to the interests of the moment – which can be considered as much a sign of social incorporation as the maintenance of a certain degree of "outsiderhood" and autonomy. Second, the symbolic status and prestige of monasticism fluctuated with the principles of social hierarchization favored by a specific balance of power, and never attained the stability and exclusive preeminence of the Buddhist renouncer vis-à-vis kings and laymen. Third, and easily overlooked, the various foci of political power and institutional authority already mentioned provided monasticism with relatively forceful exemplars of institutional formalization, legalistic and centralizing tendencies, and massive administrative structure that had no equivalent in the Theravada setting. Most essentially, perhaps, this greater ideological plurality of the Christian setting favored a transactional mode of interaction between virtuosi and the environment, and ultimately defeated the existence of a distinct virtuoso sector within an increasingly differentiated and competitive economic and ideological marketplace.

8 Virtuoso radicalism: a self-defeating triumph

It is clear from the previous chapter that Christian monasticism was a more "dynamic" and autonomous institution than the Theravada Sangha, forcefully interacting with other social sectors and playing an important part in an arena of shifting social forces and coalitions. Up to the eleventh century, this part was mostly conservative. Abbots usually bowed to and even supported the external authority of kings and popes, while fending for their own material and ideal interests in a world they basically accepted as it was. The strong influence of monasticism in the Gregorian attempt to restructure Christian society was a sign of monasticism's vitality and prestige. Ultimately, however, this influence should be understood as the result of a close collaboration with the ecclesiastical hierarchy – an effective alloy of monastic prestige and ecclesiastical institutional power. On the whole, therefore, Christian monasticism cannot be said to have been much more anti- or counterstructural than its Theravada equivalent, despite its criticism of the world – and of the Church in the world especially – so important at its emergence, and maintained in a more subdued fashion throughout its subsequent stages. Seguy's conception of Christian monasticism as a form of "implicit protest" (see this volume, Chapter 2) may be applied without much reservation throughout the period under study, although this aspect may seem at times to be completely superseded by the elaborate network of mutual support and exchange between monasteries and society.

Reform and internal differentiation

The virtuoso sector, as already suggested, was not altogether homogeneous; it went through a process of increasing internal differentiation. It is precisely in this process of differentiation that one may still discern the periodic resurgence of the basically asocial, antisocial, or countersocial premises of the monastic form of life. The overriding difference from the Sangha is that Christian monasticism very early became characterized by a much greater degree of differentiation and polarization, eventually leading to the emergence of forms of virtuosity overflowing the boundaries of classical monasticism. In a first, less-differentiated stage, which ran roughly up to the end of the tenth century, Benedict's Rule was the normative standard, even if modified in many areas by the surviving influence of various layers of local monastic tradition. However, from

the eleventh century on, one can discern a number of trends that significantly modified the mostly "conservative" picture of the monasticism–society relationship already described – such as, in particular, the emergence of changing forms of virtuoso radicalism and the immense acceleration in differentiation of the virtuoso sector in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

From its emergence up to and including tenth-century Cluny, Christian monasticism was gradually incorporated into an elaborate network of competition and exchange with other social sectors. This was not necessarily perceived as contradicting the monastic ideal, which even in its dominant, Benedictine version could be interpreted with a certain range of freedom. Increased entanglement in worldly affairs and interests, coupled as it was with other forms of slackening of monastic discipline, however, did lead the more rigorist minded to periodic attempts at reform, usually couched in the terms of a return to the pristine purity of the Benedictine Rule. One may see this as a repetition of the process through which monasticism itself emerged, at least in part – as a reaction to and a product of the growing institutionalization and routinization of the mother church.

At first, reform did not necessarily mean the introduction of new divisions into the monastic world: Benedict of Aniane's reform brought Western and especially Gallic monasticism to an unprecedented level of uniformity and standardization, while introducing a number of innovations – such as a new emphasis on the liturgy, as well as an increased centralization and its enforcement by an act of state – clearly at variance with the original Benedictine spirit. Eventually, however, the reforming impulse also led to the emergence of a range of new forms of monastic life and to sharp variations within the monastic sector: Beginning with Cluny (itself intended as a return to a stricter observance of Saint Benedict of Aniane's reform); expanding with the emergence of the Cistercians and of a range of eremitical, canonial, and then military orders; further continuing with the formation of women's orders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and culminating with the appearance of the mendicant orders from the early thirteenth century on. Here I shall concentrate on the historical development of the eremitic strand – the closest equivalent of the Theravada Buddhist forest monks – that strikingly exemplifies the typical features of the relation between virtuosi and society in medieval Christianity.[1]

[1] On the historical development of the eremitic strand, see especially the invaluable collection of articles in *L'eremitismo in Occidente nei secoli XI–XII* (Milan: Universite cattolica del Sacre Cuore, 1965); "Érémitisme et hérésie au Moyen-Age," in *Hérésies et sociétes dans l'Europe pré-industrielle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), pp. 139–145; H. Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism: A Study of*

Eremitism "old" and "new"

To begin with, the medieval Christian equivalent of the Sangha's differentiation into forest and village monks seems to have given rise to a greater institutional differentiation and polarization, not only between eremitic and cenobitic monasticism but also between forms of withdrawal – either eremitic or cenobitic – more fully disconnected from their social surroundings than their Theravada correspondents, and forms of involvement with the laity – whether monastic, eremitic (paradoxical as it may seem) or, later, mendicant – that made the "worldoriented" pole of Christian virtuosity more worldly than even the worldliest Buddhist village monks.

The eremitic and cenobitic traditions appear to have coexisted from the very beginning: Contemporary with Anthony (c. 251–356), who is said to have spent twenty years in isolation before coming out to lead others to the solitary life, was Pachomius, who founded the first known cenobitic community in 315 and wrote what is probably the earliest rule. The two forms of life were far from being necessarily antagonistic, although disagreement as to their respective preeminence and worth obtained at times. Not only did eremitic, semieremitic, and fully cenobitic forms of life coexist; they were tried in succession by individual ascetics and easily transformed from one into the other in what appears to have been a very fluid ascetic milieu.[2] This fluidity could even be extended to the secular Church, which, as noted, could rechannel the special holiness of desert ascetics back into the ecclesiastical leadership. Thus there was no sharp opposition between ascetics and the established ecclesiastical hierarchy; it would be mistaken to see the desert ascetics of early monasticism as the carriers of anti-institutional charisma.[3] This was not contradicted by later history: The Rule of Saint Benedict acknowledged eremitism as the final stage, for which cenobitic monasticism was deemed to be a preparatory school. Cluny itself, often considered the powerful prototype of cenobitic, established monasticism, provided

Religious Communities in Western Europe, 1000–1150 (London: Macmillan Press, 1984); J. Heuclin, *Aux origines monastiques de la Gaule du nord: ermites et reclus du Ve aux XIe siècles.* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1988); L. Gougaud, "La vie érémitique au Moyen-Age," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 1 (1920): 209–40, 313–28; C. Kingsley, *The Hermits* (London: Macmillan Press, 1869); R. Doyere, "Érémitisme," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* vol. 4 (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1960).

[2] Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church.*

[3] In Drijvers's words, "The ascetic represented in a paradigmatic, exemplary way what was actually a requirement of everybody . . . 'das ausseralltagliche' was from its beginning, an institution with an exemplary function, for the ecclesiastical authories as well as for the bulk of the believers." See Drijvers, "Askese und Mönchtum."

room within its domains for solitary ascetics. Hermits often maintained ties with their monastery and abbot, and remained willingly dependent on monks for the sacraments. It was not uncommon, moreover, for bishops or abbots to go off to temporary eremitic retreats while in office, or to become hermits upon retirement.

Among the laity, the hermit aroused admiration for his spiritual worth, and, not unlike the holy men of late antiquity in Peter Brown's analysis, attracted the interest of those seeking the disinterested advice of outside "bearers of objectivity."[4] A similar function seems to have been fulfilled by the recluse, a solitary ascetic whose cell was typically located right next to the parish church, that is, at the very center of the local community.[5] Kings themselves were not indifferent to hermits of special holiness, bestowing forests and monasteries upon them, seeking their blessing before going to war, or even forcing them to take up residence at court.

The distinction between a rather conservative first stage and a more dynamic and potentially revolutionary second stage, beginning around the eleventh century, is here again of major significance, as will be emphasized later in this section. Nevertheless, even in the first long, conservative stage, when the coexistence between the eremitic and cenobitic strands and between eremitism and the world (including the church) was relatively peaceful and uneventful, one may already note a number of important differences with the Theravada eremitic forest tradition that bring into relief Christian eremitism's more anarchic and subversive character.

First, whereas the Buddhist hermit virtuoso, no less than other monks, referred himself to the *Vinaya* and other classical Buddhist scriptures that clearly defined the prototypical stages of spiritual progress and perfection, Christian hermits were on the whole left on their own "in the wilderness," to pursue an individual quest that led Christian eremitism to greater ideological and practical variety than its Buddhist counterpart. This eremitic individualism, with its potential for spiritual anarchy and deviance, could arouse monastic, clerical, or lay suspicion and even opposition. Only at a rather late stage did eremitic rules make a rather weak appearance (in contrast with Theravada Buddhism, where there was never any specialized eremitic rule differentiated from the *Vinaya*). Even in the case of the highly regulated institution of anchoritism in England, rules for anchorites are merely sets of suggestions and advice, in contrast to monastic rules formulated as demands.[6]

[4] See this volume, Chapter 2.

[5] See, for example, H. Mayr-Harting, "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse," *History* 60 (1975): 344–5.

[6] A. K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 101.

Second, even if one ignores for the moment the methodological problem, relevant to both settings, posed by those hermits who withdrew from all contact with society and left no historical record, the possibility of full detachment from society seems much less plausible in the Theravada tradition. Even if theoretically implied by the Buddhist ideal of radical world renunciation, it seems to be hampered by the various doctrinal injunctions that prevent the renouncer from providing for his own food and shelter, and the highly detailed (if never compulsory) pattern of interaction with the laity.[7] Furthermore, whereas the prime element in the definition of Buddhist hermitages is a greater disconnection from the laity, as symbolized by the opposition between village and forest – a forest that, as noted, need not be very distant – Christian hermits could also be defined by withdrawal from any community, be it monastic or lay, and by their striving for total, individual isolation, *solum cum solo.* From the perspective of the second phase of the development of eremitism and of the virtuoso sector in general, starting after the tenth century, we may be tempted to see this easier and more total disconnection of the virtuoso ascetic from all social unit as a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter.* The extraordinary revival of the eremitic movement in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when, in Peter Damian's phrase, "it seemed as if the whole world would be turned into a hermitage," represents in fact a new form of eremitism: rekindling, to be sure, the traditional controversies between eremitism and cenobitism, but also adopting a more agressive stance, more critical of both monks and clergy, and, even more important, more insistent on reforming the laity and society at large (thus explaining its temporary convergence with the aims of the Gregorian reform).[8]

A major characteristic of the new eremitic movements, starting with the founding of Calmaldoli by Romuald of Ravenna at the beginning of the eleventh century in Italy, is the discontent with the corporate wealth and worldly involvement of traditional monasticism as epitomized by Cluny and Gorze, and the yearning for a return to greater solitude, poverty, and simplicity. Nevertheless, in contradistinction to traditional eremitism, and in what represented a confluence of the eremitic and apostolic traditions, the new hermits did not seek solitude for one or two individuals, but formed collective groups in remote, uninhabited locations. Furthermore, some of these new "hermits" engaged, somewhat paradoxically from the point of view of more traditional categories, in preaching to the laity, trying to communicate their discontent with the

[7] These very basic strictures upon the individuality of the Buddhist renouncer have been emphasized in Tambiah, "Renouncer."

[8] See Chenu, "Monks, Canons and Laymen"; Cantor, "Crisis of Western Monasticism;" Leclercq, "The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Century," in N. Hunt (ed.), *Cluniac Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1971), pp. 217–37; Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism.*

contemporary state of Christianity at large and their impulse for religious reform.

The response elicited by this new type of hermit was not always uniform. As a rule, the hermits appealed to the masses who thronged to their preaching; and although receiving the support of local bishops, they generally clashed with traditional monks and the secular priests in whose domain (and with whose livelihood) they were seen to interfere. Given the intensity of their criticism, and the fact that they were deviating from normal patterns of monastic obedience, it is surprising that they remained, with few exceptions, within the pale of orthodoxy. This may be seen, at least in part, as the result of the initial alliance with the Gregorian reform, where someone like Peter Damian, deeply involved in the eremitic movement, played a pioneering role. However, it is also important to note that these new hermits were seeking not a free, formless life, but rather a better and more stringent rule. They did not necessarily intend to be innovative. On the contrary, the new groups and movements all referred themselves to one or more of three major traditions: the apostolic life of the primitive Church in Jerusalem, as described in the Gospels; the desert fathers; and the Benedictine Rule itself, in its pristine purity. The progressive abandonment of their original, rather inchoate forms of life – often to join a recognized order, albeit cleaving to a more rigorous enactment of its rule – should not be seen as a classical case of routinization of charisma, of the weakening and compromise of ideals, but on the contrary as a conscious, sustained concern with the search for rules, as the expression even of a legalistic bent, to be placed in the context of the new, contemporary concern with legal forms and order.[9]

The ultimate acceptance of ecclesiastical authority, the dependence on the support of bishops, and the concern with legal structure all exemplify the reproduction, within the eremitic sector, of the vertical principle identified earlier. It is remarkable that this vertical principle functioned as a powerful force of incorporation and structuration even among those strands of the virtuoso sector that might have been thought most a- or anti-institutional, and thus most immune to its impact.

Some of these new groupings, such as the Camaldoli and Carthusians, did give rise to eremitic or semieremitic forms of monastic organization too novel to fit into any traditional cenobitic pattern. An important innovation, most productively put to use by the Cistercians, was the use of lay brothers, freeing a contemplative elite from the burden of economic and

[9] Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism*, p. 3. This was not true of all eremitic trends of the period. The Grandmontese refused to acknowledge the necessity of an order, denying that they were either monks, canons, or hermits, and claiming the Gospel for their only rule (ibid., p. 88).

administrative duties and acting as a buffer between the hermitage or convent and the secular world. Indeed, it has been pointed out that the overall conservative and even fundamentalist orientation to pristine monastic traditions coexisted in some cases with a not altogether unconscious positive attitude to religious novelty, to the conscious creation of new forms of religious life – an element with no equivalent, it seems, in any form of virtuoso radicalism in traditional Theravada Buddhism.[10]

In general, the eremitic revival of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and its various eremitic, semieremitic, and apostolic offshoots involved, in varying degrees, not so much an attempt at reviving the solitary forms of eremitic life as an attempt at recovering a true enactment of religious "poverty" by disentangling the monastic collective from the corrupting influence of corporate wealth and the elaborate network of exchange with the laity.[11] The radical, albeit still monastic (rather than eremitic) solution to that problem, was first of all to establish themselves on a remote, uninhabited territory and withdraw from the *cura animarum,* as well as to reemphasize the place of manual labor and autonomous economic production in the monastic regime, to refuse many traditional sources of monastic income (tithes, manorial rents, serfs, churches, etc.), and, not least, to refuse childoblates. (There is now increasing evidence, however, that this view of the Cistercians' pristine impetus may have been somewhat exaggerated: Far from always settling in deserted, wild locations, they also set up residence in places that were already settled and even cultivated, and from which they actually expulsed the previous population, as well as retaining many of the traditional "feudal" features and entanglements).[12] At the same time, they introduced both lay brothers and hired labor so as to allow enough time for prayer, meditation, and study. The illiterate lay brothers were not recruited, however, on purely instrumental, economic grounds. An important element in the remarkable spread of the Cistercian order was the formal incorporation of laymen into the monastic community (a potential feature of Christian monasticism we have already noted); this

[10] See G. Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," in R. Benson and G. Constable (eds.), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 37–67.

[11] McDonnel, "Vita Apostolica"; A. Vauchez, "La pauvreté volontaire au Moyen-Age," *Annales* 25 (1970): 1566–73; Manteuffel, *Naissance d'une hérésie;* L. K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978); M. D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty: The Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210–1323* (London: S. P. C. K., 1961).

[12] See C. H. Berman, *Medieval Agriculture, the Southern French Countryside, and the Early Cistercians: A Study of Forty-three Monasteries,* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1986); G. Despy, "Les richesses de la terre: Citeaux et Prémontré devant l'économie de profit aux XIIe et XIIe siècles," *Problèmes d'Histoire du Christianisme* (1974), 58–80; Lekai, *Cistercians.*

provided laymen with a form of spiritual justification, sanctification of labor, and asceticism that, although not making them equal to the choirmonks, were at least a partial response to the wave of lay religious fervor that spread through eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe. The well-known paradox of the Cistercian order is that, through skillful management of great estates and aggressive commercial entrepreneurship, it quickly became extremely wealthy. At the root of that wealth, however, was not only their own labor but a generous flow of endowments, at least in the early decades of the order. The basic gift relationship was therefore maintained, a striking fact considering that at the same time so many other elements of interaction with the laity had been rejected.

It is important to note that many of the eremitic and semieremitic formations were often a fluid and transitory phenomenon. Individuals and even entire groups could pass back and forth from one form of life to another – especially between the eremitical and canonical options,[13] often ending up returning with little modification, as mentioned, to the Benedictine fold. It has even been suggested that the new eremitic formations corresponded to a social and economic structure itself in a state of transition, when cities were already sufficiently developed to cause religious flight but not enough to motivate what would come later, namely the apostolic, mendicant duty to urban populations.[14] At any rate, it was only with the new combination of corporate poverty and preaching to the masses in the mendicant orders of the early thirteenth century, and most notably the early Franciscans, that reliance upon endowments, together with so many other classical features of the religious life – such as monastic enclosure and stability – was seriously (if temporarily) challenged.

The new forms of religious life did not, however, completely supersede the more traditional ones, either monastic or eremitic. In fact, the hermit saint remained a recurrent figure in medieval French literature.[15] His role in the Arthurian romance, especially, has been analyzed as a benevolent utility figure, performing a variety of minor services for

[13] See L. Millis, "Ermites et chanoines réguliers au XII siècle," *Cahiers de Civilization Médiévale* 22 (1979): 39–80. The Augustianian order of canons was the outcome of attempts to replace the Capitula of Aix (816) by a much more rigorous concept of the canonical life, one that emphasized the *vita apostolica,* the need for poverty. The ideals of these and of the hermits were therefore closely allied; many of the first communities of regular canons were formed either by hermits or as a result of their teaching; some allowed for private property, whereas others opposed it.

[14] L. Genicot, "L'erémitisme du XIe siècle dans son contexte économique et social," in *L'eremitismo in Occidente,* pp. 45–71.

[15] A. J. Kennedy, "The Hermit's Role in French Arthurian Romance (c. 1170–1530), *Romania* 91 (1974): 54–81; E. Franceschini, "La figura dell'eremita nella letteratura latina medioevale," in *L'eremitismo in Occidente,* pp. 561–9; Kingsley, *Hermits,* pp. 219–23.

knight-errantry, but also, more important, as a didactic figure, a vigorous exponent of Christian chivalry (particularly in the Grail texts composed around 1180–1230), or a severe critic of contemporary Christianity. It is interesting that Christian hermits, in the literary imagination of the period, were not necessarily defined by disconnection from the laity, but on the contrary by a special proximity to knights and kings and, in general, to the common people.[16] In Jacques Le Goff's analysis, the hermit emerges as the closest of all religious figures to popular folklore and sensibility, located in a "forest" embodying distance from high, learned culture (rather than from society as a whole).

The affinities between eremitic and popular spirituality have been finely examined, together with the heretic, heterodox potential that these might have implied; the stress has usually been, however, on the fact that hermits, as a rule, remained within the confines of orthdoxy.[17] Nevertheless, some of the wide range of groupings and trends loosely lumped together under the flexible title of the eremitic–apostolic revival did come into confrontation with the ecclesiastical authority and were ultimately condemned as heretical (these include the Cathars, Arnoldians, Patarins, Humiliati, Waldensians, and the direct offshoots of a specifically mendicant, Franciscan spirituality, the Fraticelli and Apostolic Brethren.[18] The impact of Joachim of Fiore upon the Fraticelli in particular may be seen as a case of the potentially subversive confluence of ascetic and millenarian orientations. His vision of the historical development of the Church and even mankind in three stages, the last of them characterized by the dominance of the ascetic virtuosi, is the culmination of the unmistakably increasing claim of Christian virtuosi to shape not only their own fate and salvation, but that of Christian society as a whole. It has been pointed out, however, that the dividing line between orthodoxy and heresy in this remarkable efflorescence of reli-

[16] Le Goff notes among other characteristics of the hermit – such as the hermit as "wild man," as the counterpart and conversant of kings in the forest as a sacred place, and as close to the outlaws in the same forest that is also the locus of the wild and untamed – his special closeness to people, who come to him to confess, ask for advice, or seek blessing or healing. See "Le désert-forêt dans l'Occident médiéval," in *L'imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp. 59–75.

[17] See E. Delaruelle, "Les ermites et la spiritualité populaire," in *L'eremitismo in Occidente*, pp. 212–41; J. Becquet, "L'érémitisme clérical et laïc dans l'ouest de la France," in ibid, pp. 182–204; "Érémitisme et hérésie au Moyen-Age," in *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle*, pp. 139–45. Although hermits could easily arouse suspicions of heresy, Becquet is of the opinion that historically they did not display any special predisposition to heresy. Nevertheless, the problem of documentation remains, as noted in Chapter 2, as well as that of the definition, doctrinal vs. institutional, of heresy.

[18] See Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, pp. 182–208; idem, *Franciscan Poverty;* G. Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent, c. 1250–1450* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1967), pp. 167–238.

gious movements seems to lie not so much in differences of religious beliefs and doctrines, but rather in the willingness to come to terms with ecclesiastic authority, that is, to acknowledge the vertical principle in the regulation of religious virtuosity within the Church.[19] One may surmise that acknowledgment of this vertical regulation was made even more vital in light of the obvious threat not only to the ecclesiastical, but to the social order in general, that was entailed by the radical attack against both individual and corporate wealth.

We shall not go further into the historical development of the mendicant orders nor of virtuoso radicalism in general. Of primary interest here is the impact that the remarkable internal differentiation of the virtuoso sector had upon the more traditional patterns of segregation, competition, and exchange between virtuosi and society. Clearly, monasticism lost its monopoly and was overtaken by new forms of monastically inspired virtuosity, critical of Benedictine wealth and laxity, and aspiring to stricter forms of ascetic abnegation. The latter, however, would go one of two ways in redefining the relation to the laity: One possibility was to withdraw even further from the laity; the other – in what forms a brand of virtuoso radicalism with no equivalent in the traditional Theravada Buddhist setting – was to intensify interaction with the laity and cater to its religious needs in the world to an extent and manner as yet unprecedented. Both options undoubtedly deviated from the previous balance of segregation and exchange between monks and laymen.

In any case, both virtuosi and laymen now found themselves facing a rich and bewildering spectrum of virtuosity, enhancing the elements of choice, competition, and explicit exchange present in the earlier stage.[20]

[19] This is strongly argued in Manteuffel, *Naissance d'une hérésie*, who stresses the relativity of heresy to the degree of centralization of the Church. It is no accident, in his view, that the most violent persecution of adepts of poverty coincided with the efforts of the Avignon Papacy to make of the Church an "administrative monarchy." Waldensians were condemned, in this view, because they believed that poverty gave them the right to preach without any need to receive clerical legitimacy. In Vauchez's view, many trends may be approved as long as they remained a clerical phenomenon, and may be condemned only when reaching the laity, thus threatening the very basis of social order. See Vauchez, "La pauvreté volontaire au Moyen Age."

[20] On the tension and competition among the various options and sectors, see Chenu, "Monks, Canons and Laymen"; C. Dereine, "Odon de Tournai et la crise du cénobitisme au XIe siècle," *Revue du Moyen-Age Latin* 4 (1948): 137–154; D. G. Morin, "Rainaud l'Ermite et Ives de Chartes: un épisode de la crise du cénobitisme au XIe–XIIe siècle," *Revue Bénédictine* 15 (1928): 99–115; J. Leclercq, "Le poème de Payen Bolotin contre les faux ermites," *Revue Bénédictine* 73 (1958): 52–84; Milis, "Ermites et chanoines réguliers"; McDonnel, "Vita Apostolica"; G. Constable and B. Smith, *Libellus de Diversis Ordinibus et Professionibus qui sunt in Ecclesia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972). This twelfth-century document nicely conveys the attempt by a contemporary to make sense of and tolerate the enormous new variety of religious callings. The Fourth

This could only underline the basically precarious (because increasingly contingent and conditional) nature of whatever bonds were formed between virtuosi and society. Finally, the increasing access of the laity itself to forms of religious virtuosity of its own – in a wide range of orders and confraternities – would further contribute to undermining the segregation and distinction between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi, and thus the very possibility of a differentiated virtuoso institution.

Lateran Council in 1215 tried indeed to restrain the emergence of new forms of religious life by requiring that any new group join one of the already acknowledged orders. See also Constable, "Diversity of Religious Life," pp. 29–47.

Part IV
Virtuosity, charisma, and social order

9 Virtuosity and the virtuoso–society complex

The institutionalization of religious virtuosity in traditional Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism displays some fundamental similarities. Most obviously, virtuosity gave rise, in both settings, to monastic "alternative structures" (in the sense defined in Chapter 2) that shared a number of features and dilemmas. I have tried to show, however, that these inherently precarious structures also relied on different, even contrasting, patterns of institutionalization. A major aim of the comparision was to contradict the frequent assertions of a contrast between otherworldly Buddhist "weakness" and "looseness" vis-à-vis Western Christian "power" and "dynamism" in matters of institutional building and worldly involvement. Buddhism developed in *and around* the monastic institution a social structure of impressive historical strength and effectiveness that could be properly identified and assessed, it was argued, only by distinguishing between a number of criteria of institutionalization.

In terms of formal organization, autonomy (organizational, economic, and social), and political power, Theravada Buddhist monasticism was shown to be much weaker an institution than its Christian equivalent. In terms of the position of monasticism within the social structure at large, however, Buddhist monasticism appears to have been more solidly institutionalized, retaining, with impressive stability and with only minor variations, a specific social position and pattern of relationship with wider society. In contrast, the position of monasticism in medieval Europe changed with time, was a constant focus of controversy, and was seriously undermined toward the end of the period under study.

Up to that point, however, the greater organizational capacity of Christian monasticism, on the one hand, and its more ambiguous and unstable social position, on the other, may be understood as two complementary aspects of Christian monasticism taken as a more powerful "alternative structure" within society at large: an alternative structure, that is, displaying both a stronger autonomy from and a more forceful interaction and even competition with other groups and social sectors.

In contrast, the institutional strength of monasticism in traditional Theravada Buddhism – where it also formed an alternative structure in the sense of presenting a form of life antithetical and alternative to average social life – was to be found not so much in its own organizational-

institutional structures and direct political power (both relatively elusive), but rather in its forming the nexus of a virtuoso–layman relation that came to form an essential axis of social organization in Theravada Buddhist societies. In other words, institution building may be viewed not only in terms of organizational-corporate status, but also, as suggested in the Introduction, in terms of sets of relationships or relational structures.

The Theravada virtuoso–layman relational structure was also shown to have had a partial and temporary equivalent in medieval Catholicism: Christian monasticism was also sustained for a long period (roughly from the sixth to the twelfth centuries) by a pattern of interaction and exchange with nonvirtuosi that resembled the Theravada pattern. At the end of that period, however, it was drastically shattered (if not completely eradicated), together with the overall social position and cultural significance of monasticism itself. Emphasizing this temporary convergence has a double significance from a comparative sociological perspective. One is historical and substantive, in that the convergence has usually been overlooked in comparative interpretations more intent on uncovering those unique features of the medieval West that may explain the advent of capitalism and modernity. The other is theoretical, in that the virtuoso–layman relation entails a distinctive cluster of sociological processes – that is, a sociological "complex" – that has not received its due attention and typological elaboration. Although fundamentally related to charisma in the very largest sense of this term, I submit that this virtuoso–society complex is also clearly distinguishable from the cluster of sociological processes associated either with the compelling appeal of "pure," "concentrated," personal charisma, or with the notion of routinized, "institutional" charisma.

Virtuosity and charisma

First, it is necessary to define the core features of religious virtuosity itself, independently of its ties to any specific religious and historical context. An important contribution toward such a definition is Michael Hill's analysis of the religious order, which he defines, among other things, as "a collection of religious virtuosi with an uncompromising interpretation of the Gospel ethic which is sanctioned by the church but is not put forward as necessary for all." Hill's analysis confines itself to the area of Christianity and does not claim cross-cultural validity. Furthermore, it is intended to also encompass nonmonastic religious orders, and does not address itself to the issue of monasticism proper. Of primary interest to us, however, is his conception of virtuosity itself, and the fact that he defines it, ideal-typically, mainly through distinguishing

it from charisma, a Weberian concept that has enjoyed much greater impact in the sociological study of religion and under which religious virtuosity has often been too readily subsumed.[1]

Weber himself, in fact, occasionally used the term "charisma" in connection with religious virtuosi.[2] On such occasions, however, he used it in the usual sense of an exceptional religious gift and an essentially personal attribute, rather than in the sense of his own (later) analytical elaboration of charisma as part of a typology of forms of authority.[3] Charisma in the latter sense seems in fact to refer to a range of phenomena that only partially overlap, and in some important ways even stand in contrast to those associated with religious virtuosity.

Whereas Weber emphasized the contrast between virtuoso religion and mass religion and did not try to clarify its analytical relation to charisma, Hill sees virtuoso religion – correctly, in my opinion – as distinguishable from both mass religion and the religion of charismatic figures. Virtuosi and charismatics may be related empirically, but there is, to his mind, a basic difference between the two types: One represents the rigorous restatement of an existing religious tradition, the other, a shattering of tradition and the articulation of a new basis of normative obligation.

Hill argues that virtuosity has characteristically relied on a traditional type of legitimation – such as a pristine model of religious purity or the original rule of the order – even if this did not necessarily prevent it from eventually functioning as a lever for change under certain circumstances. He does not deny, however, that members of religious orders and monastic communities have often exhibited charismatic characteristics, or that the origins of Christian monasticism entailed a strong charismatic component. But it is claims to traditional legitimacy, he asserts, that have played the dominant role in the accommodation between virtuoso religion and church religion. Furthermore, he is struck by the high degree of formal organization of Christian virtuosi in comparison to those in other religions – a fact he attributes to their "characteristic capacity to embody tradition."

The weakness of this argument notwithstanding – both the lesser capacity of virtuosity in other religions to "embody tradition" and the causal relationship between such a capacity and formal organization being far from evident – it should be recalled that Hill's primary concern is with the religious order, that is, with formally organized virtuosity, and not with virtuosity in its various possible manifestations, includ-

[1] Hill, *Religious Order*.

[2] See for example his use of the word "charisma" in the definition of religious virtuosity at the beginning of Chapter 2.

[3] Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 241–51, 1111–56.

ing the less institutionalized and less tradition-affirming ones. Another problem with this distinction – virtuosity as entailing the rigorous restatement of tradition versus charisma that shatters tradition – is that (as Hill himself has pointed out in another work)[4] a charismatic breakthrough can very well entail the rigorous restatement of tradition. Finally, he contrasts virtuosity with dynamic, subversive charisma only, ignoring its relation to other forms of charisma, and in particular to what Weber called "official" or institutional charisma – defined as one of the possible results of the routinization of charisma, whereby charisma comes to reside in the position or office rather than in the person. This last notion, and its later elaboration in the work (each in his own way) of Shils and Eisenstadt,[5] has been much criticized as widening the notion of charisma to the point of trivializing it. Nevertheless, it may have to be taken into account, precisely because of certain features of monastic virtuosity that, as will be clarified later in this section, appear to locate it somewhere between charisma in its genuine, "dynamic" pole and its more institutionalized pole, and to thus indicate the need for more refined categories of analysis. Redefining virtuosity and its relation to charisma in both the "genuine" and "institutional" sense will be a crucial step in establishing the distinctive cluster of sociological phenomena associated with the institutionalization of virtuosity in the two specific historical settings under study. Virtuoso and charismatic figures appear to share some important features: They both display a privileged and single-minded connection to the realm of ultimate goals and values, however conceived. Both entail, in different ways but with similar intensity, something outside, beyond, and even antithetical to the socially "normal" and "ordinary." Yet it would be mistaken to subsume religious virtuosi under the general category of charismatic religious figures and see them as just another instance of the perennial "charisma versus institution" antithesis.

It may be useful at this point to define virtuosity by a number of core features independent of particular ideological contents and institutional expressions, making it possible to use the concept across cultural contexts and historical periods. First, religious virtuosity is a matter of individual choice, a voluntary option implying an intense personal commitment, in contrast with the more or less compulsory and/or routine norms and expectations of common religious behavior. Second, it entails a search for perfection, an extreme urge to go beyond everyday life and average

[4] Hill, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 153–7.

[5] For the full elaboration and amplification of charisma as a crucial component of institutional life and social order in general, see E. Shils, "Charisma, Order and Status," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 199–213; S. N. Eisenstadt, "Introduction," in idem (ed.), *Max Weber*, pp. ix–lvi.

norms of achievement as defined in each cultural setting. It is this general attitude of straining toward perfection that should be seen as the primary feature, independent of its precise orientation (worldly or otherworldly, activistic or contemplative, ascetic or mystical, etc.). Third, this search for perfection is sustained in a disciplined, systematic fashion, entailing a singleminded adherence to fixed principles of behavior, a defined rule or method. Fourth, it implies a normative double standard: Its rigor is considered neither possible nor necessary for all, from either a virtuoso or nonvirtuoso point of view.[6] Fifth, it is based on achievement. Virtuosity is in principle an option open to all, even if actually valid for a "heroic" minority only. There is thus an element of elitism – one based, however, on achievement and nonascriptive criteria.

Looking at this list of features, it is clear that some of them might fully apply to "pure," personal charisma as well. Virtuoso and charismatic types, indeed, may well be empirically related, and even occasionally coincide. In fact, there may be a fluidity or actual liability between the two: Virtuosi may develop into charismatic figures, and the latter may in turn give rise to new forms of virtuosity. Virtuosi, however, do not as a rule turn into charismatic figures; and as long as they do not, they constitute a sociological type with distinctive, if indeed "quieter" (but not necessarily less socially significant) features. "Pure," personal charisma is credited, in Weber's well-known discussion of charismatic authority, with an essentially dynamic and subversive, anti-institutional potential. Religious virtuosi, in contrast, are not typically anti-institutional – Hill even emphasized their "conservative" character – even if they clearly represent something that is not altogether institutionalized and may even stand in tension with established authorities.

The last three features in the list are especially useful in bringing out interesting ideal-typical differences between virtuosity and charisma and giving us a better understanding of the distinctive features of monasticism as a "virtuoso institution" and of the "virtuoso-society" sociological complex with which it came to be associated in Theravada Buddhism and medieval Catholicism.

The first major difference lies in virtuosity's discliplined, methodic character, contrasting with one of the basic features of Weber's pure, genuine charisma, namely its resistance to any form of rational planning and discipline. This "practical religious rationalism," to use Schluchter's

[6] One may note the relevance of philosophical discussions of "supererogatory" actions, i.e., actions that possess moral value and that an agent may feel called upon to perform, but that cannot be demanded, and whose omission cannot be called wrongdoing. See, for example, J. O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes," in J. Feinberg (ed.), *Moral Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Heyd, *Supererogation.*

term,[7] predisposes virtuosity to formalization and organization. It does not, however, automatically identify virtuosity with institutional or routinized charisma, which is not necessarily characterized by rationality in general (in whatever sense of the term) or by this specific mode of rationality in particular. At any rate, it lends virtuosity a sustained character that contrasts with the volatile character of genuine charisma, which typically cannot be sustained for long and is bound either to disappear, or undergo routinization, transforming itself in the process into something radically opposed to its original nature.

The next distinction concerns the type of elitism involved. In a sense, charisma too transcends primordial and ascriptive attributes and is thus "open" to all, at the same time as it clearly pertains to the very few only. Nevertheless, it tends to be conceived as a spontaneous, extraordinary personal gift, one which may have to unfold, reveal, and sustain itself, but, unlike virtuosity, cannot be learned, and is not, nor should be revealed as, achieved, acquired, or developed.

Furthermore, there is a crucial difference in the type of relationship established with a following or "audience." The relational nature of charisma has often been emphasized: Only those individuals – and by extension, those ideals, values, or institutions – are charismatic that are recognized as such by other people. Charisma depends on its attribution, confirmation, and maintenance by an audience. Similarly, virtuosity presupposes the existence of nonvirtuosi and can be fully comprehended only when a nonvirtuoso vantage point is reckoned with. Nevertheless, significant differences between the two might be found precisely along this "relational" dimension.

A major difference is that virtuosity entails a normative double standard, whereas charisma need not. The virtuoso's rigor is considered neither possible nor necessary for all; it does not automatically determine the religious status and worth of nonvirtuosi – even, however paradoxical it may seem, where the virtuoso's superiority is clearly recognized. In a sense, charisma – as an exceptional, personal gift reserved to the extraordinary few – implies an even more radical, quasi-ontological demarcation between the charismatic individual and others. This demarcation is too sharp to be accounted for by a "merely" normative, ethical double standard. Charisma originates a more demanding, total kind of relation – which made Weber include it, significantly, within his general typology of forms of authority. As such, it is said to call for total devotion and commitment, and for a relation of deep personal identification from the followers of the charismatic figure. Virtuosity, in contrast, seems to call for dissociation and differentiation between virtuosi and

[7] Schluchter, "Paradox of Rationalization," p. 15.

nonvirtuosi, and implies a less direct and comprehensive commitment on the audience's part. Although virtuosity does presuppose a non-virtuoso point of reference, it is less dependent on external recognition than charisma, which is by definition dependent on an intense emotional bond between the charismatic figure and his followers.

Finally, virtuosi's tendencies to dissociation can take the form of radical (individual or collective) withdrawal from normal patterns of social relationships. This contrasts with the outreaching, communicative social tendencies of dynamic charisma, whatever the size of the audience it aims at. It is important to note, however, that dissociation and withdrawal can become the basis of and a stage in the accumulation of charismatic potential, as suggested earlier, whether the latter is taken in its more "institutional" and dispersed, or "dynamic" and concentrated, sense.

All these differences do not necessarily obviate the "rigorous restatement of tradition" that Hill considered a determining characteristic of virtuosity; but we should distinguish, when assessing the precise relation of virtuosi to tradition, between the virtuosi's perspective and that of society. Although virtuosi do tend to perceive themselves as representing or rigorously restoring the pristine purity of an impaired or corrupted tradition (a tendency also found, as already mentioned, in charismatic breakthroughs – sometimes mixed with a conscious attempt at religious innovation), their relation to tradition as perceived by society at large, and by the religious establishment in particular, ought to be seen as an empirical variable to be gauged in each specific case.

The same argument applies to virtuosi's potential for "charismatization" vis-à-vis or within the outside world, whether referring to charisma in its more dynamic or in its institutional forms. Virtuosi may come to represent, in certain cases, a form of countertradition or protest. Indeed, it is precisely their direct, single-minded commitment to the realm of ultimate concerns and values – in other words, to the charismatic dimension of human action in Shils's sense – and the consequent attempt to reestablish a pure, rigorous enactment of a religious tradition they perceive as endangered or transformed by the forces of routinization and institutionalization, that make them apt to develop countertradition and dissent.[8]

The crucial characteristic, however, is virtuosi's distinctive capacity to maintain themselves, in the process, in an ambiguous stance within soci-

[8] For a most suggestive study in this regard, see the analysis of religious "precisionist" movements in M. Fulbrook, *Piety and Politics: Religion and the Rise of Absolutism in England, Württemberg and Prussia* (Cambridge University Press, 1983); and B. Mazlich, *The Revolutionary Ascetic: Evolution of a Political Type* (New York: Basic, 1976).

ety at large, bringing with them the formation of virtuoso "alternative structures" in the sense defined earlier (see Chapter 2). Presenting a reversed image of society at large in many respects, even while remaining within its ideological and institutional boundaries, these "alternative structures" may be seen as one way in which "the element of potential dissent [is introduced] as an inherent and continuous component of the social order."[9] As such, religious virtuosity underlines the need for a more differentiated and comparative analysis of the manifold forms of expression and incorporation of the charismatic motive in social life in general.[10] What virtuoso alternative structures exemplify, in other words, is a form of charisma that differs (for the reasons already outlined) from "pure," genuine charisma in Weber's stronger formulations of the term, entails a definitive component of institutionalized charisma, and yet also maintains an element of potential dissent or antistructure (or even counter structure) that is differently expressed and actualized in each case, and that was only partly captured by Shils's analysis of either segregated (see this volume, Chapter 2) or diffuse institutional charisma.[11]

The virtuoso complex

Virtuosity, as defined by the core features already discussed, was able to give rise to a distinctive cluster of social processes – a complex – no less significant (if less dramatic) than those associated with the better-known and often overused "charisma versus institution" complex derived from Weber's original formulation.

The first element in this complex is the formation of virtuoso alternative structures, in the sense defined in Chapter 2. There is a vast difference indeed between virtuosity as a purely individual, occasional, and localized phenomenon, and those few historical instances in which virtuosity became institutionally sustained and reinforced to the point of engendering a specialized virtuoso institution – monasticism. The characteristics of monasticism as a distinctive type of social formation have already been analyzed. It may be noted at this point that its strong propensities for rationalization and its "total institution" aspects are

[9] See S. N. Eisenstadt, "Comparative Liminality and Dynamics of Civilization," *Religion* 15 (1985): 324–5.

[10] For the recent exploration of a very different mode of incorporation of charisma into broader societal contexts (specifically, through the transformation of millenarian charismatic orientations in seventeenth-century England and New England), see A. B. Seligman, "Charisma and the Transformation of Grace in the Early Modern Era," *Social Research* 58, no. 3 (1991): 591–622.

[11] Although Shils emphasized segregation, among other things, as coping with the generally disruptive nature of intense and concentrated charisma, he did not dwell on the disruptive, subversive potential specifically entailed in monasticism's central ideological and institutional features.

obviously antagonistic to the basic features of genuine charisma. On the other hand, it also retained a strong component of systematic antithesis to ordinary social life, as well as an element of personal, optional striving and achievement, that are not usually connected with the idea of official or institutional charisma.

Another important element of the virtuoso–society complex is the enforcement of some form of segregation between virtuosi and society – a dimension rightly if only partly captured in Shils's notion of "segregated charisma." Although obviously facilitated by the existence of the monastic institution (of which it is in turn an essential condition), segregation does not necessarily take on the same character in all settings and periods: What is perceived as a threat to proper segregation in one cultural setting may not be seen as such in another. Segregation, at any rate, may be viewed as the culmination of the element of dissociation and differentiation between virtuosi and their audience intrinsic to the very notion of virtuosity and contrasting, as mentioned, with the intense emotional bond associated with charisma. As such, it should be understood as a two-sided process, encouraged by the virtuosi themselves, but also sustained (or undermined) by the nonvirtuoso environment.

Segregation, however, is also counterbalanced by the development of an intricate network of material and symbolic exchange between the virtuoso sector and society – another important feature of the virtuoso complex. This is epitomized in the gift relationship (laymen giving, virtuosi receiving) that is, in a form of exchange couched in the idiom of voluntariness and nonreciprocity, and signaling the presence of some form of solidary relationship betweeen the parties. The extent to which some form of reciprocity (material or symbolic) is nevertheless implicitly expected may vary. What actually occurs is the donation of mostly material goods by laymen to virtuosi, who in return are expected to provide some form of intangible, symbolic resources (merit, soteriological intercession, religious edification, or even – as more salient in the Theravada context – magico-ritual protection), as well as a variety of more tangible secular (educational, economic, therapeutic, and social) services. Paradoxically, the validity of this exchange is also dependent on the virtuosi's maintaining a degree of closure to reciprocity and negotiability, situating them without, or above, the range of ordinary social interactions and transactions. It is not incidental, in this regard, that monks came to provide ritual services, in both cases, in one sphere mostly: that of death and relation to the dead, confirming once again their ambiguous position as "outsiders" on the margins of ordinary social life and interaction.

Underlying this special form of exchange are distinctive ideological structures intrinsic to the virtuoso–society complex: First, the interac-

tion between virtuosi and nonvirtuosi articulates and revolves about commonly acknowledged (if not equally enacted) ultimate, noninstrumental values; second, it entails the articulation of notions of a religious double standard, distinguishing between a virtuoso norm and an average norm but also locating them on a shared soteriological continuum, allowing for a gradient in religious performance and commitment to the search for perfection; third, it tends to be accompanied by notions of a symbolic "division of labor" between the two, nonvirtuosi delegating to the virtuoso sector the direct enactment of religious ideals that they are unable or unwilling to take upon themselves (a process aptly conveyed by Troeltsch's notion of "vicarious oblation"), and virtuosi acknowledging the necessary part of nonvirtuosi in the fulfillment of basic worldly tasks and duties (e.g., material survival and procreation).

It is crucial to note that the various components of the virtuoso–society complex would not be able to develop to the same extent and in the same fashion if not for the very first component upon which they depend, that is, the institutionalization of virtuosity in the form of monastic alternative structures. This institutional dimension once recognized, however, it is also characteristic that the virtuoso–layman relationship was never fully institutionalized: However well-established, institutionalized, and ideologically articulated the relationship became, it also remained totally optional and voluntary on both sides, and is supported by only informal sanctions. Furthermore, the relationship itself – again on both sides – is rich in ambivalences and dilemmas. The perennial quandaries besetting monasticism have already been analyzed. On the laity's side, one may mention two major kinds of dilemmas. The first refers to the tendency to make the virtuoso increasingly accessible and functional – perhaps to the point of endangering whatever special spiritual valence he may have – rather than enforcing his segregation and risking total disconnection between virtuosi and laymen, and thus total "defunctionalization" of the virtuoso sector from society's point of view. The second dilemma, more psychological, entails the tension between acknowledging, admiring, and sustaining the virtuoso's spiritual superiority, versus feeling threatened by and eventually rejecting or denying it. In the final chapter, we also address a complex range of more implicit symbolic dilemmas and ambiguities (as distinguished from the more explicit and widely acknowledged ideological structures already mentioned), important for a fuller understanding of the gift relationship in particular, and of the virtuosi's distinctive form of "ideological power."

For the moment, though, it is enough to recognize that the virtuoso–society complex, as a result of its basically voluntary character and of the

many sociological ambivalences besetting it,[12] is a precarious sociological phenomenon. This precariousness is further enhanced by the ever-present possibility of corruption on either side. Economic, political, or cultural changes may unsettle it. Gift giving on the laity's side may deteriorate into a potlatchlike, competitive form of conspicious consumption and destruction of wealth.[13] The gift relationship may be transformed into an ordinary transaction, thus losing its crucial symbolic dimensions of nonreciprocity and nonnegotiability. Last but not least, virtuoso radicalism may emerge, within or without monasticism, bringing an element of instability into, or even basically undermining, the established network of relationships.

It is striking that, under certain conditions, and despite its seemingly fragile and precarious character, the virtuoso–society complex did not remain a merely localized, particularistic, and peripheral phenomenon, but could also apply at the central, macrosocietal level. In some sense, rulers had an obvious interest in supporting a politically withdrawn virtuoso sector, perhaps easier to interact with than a more politically involved religious establishment. Be that as it may, the basic virtuoso–society complex, through its very capacity to disperse at the local, peripheral level and stretch to the central level, and to bridge sectors of the population displaying differential degrees of commitment to central religious values, could come to form an overarching, macrosocietal structure, invested with diffuse but momentous political and even civilizational significance.

Crucial to the development and maintenance of macrosocietal, civilizational entities is the formation of overarching psychosocial structures, encompassing social heterogeneity and differentiation within a common cultural framework. Religious virtuosi were able to become the nexus of a wider sociological complex, of a cluster of social relationships and processes sustaining such an overarching, generalized structure. This type of structure, which is distinct from and independent of more obvious political ones, may sustain or even replace them when the latter disintegrate or fail. The virtuoso–society complex cannot be expected to develop in all societies, and might appear, when it does, in

[12] These could be shown to comprise *all* the various types of sociological ambivalence distinguished by R. K. Merton in *Sociological Ambivalence and Other Essays* (New York: Free Press, 1976).

[13] Such a process is fully documented, for example, in Gernet, *Aspects économiques du bouddhisme.* For another, interesting variation, in which donations develop as a sort of tribute to a nonascetic aristocracy of holy men themselves indulging in conspicuous consumption, see D. Cruise O'Brien, "Don divin, don terrestre: l'économie de la confrérie mouride," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 15 (1974): 82–101.

significant variants of the ideal-typical configuration defined above. In the next chapter, I seek to define the broader social and cultural conditions favorable to its historical crystallization and persistence, as well as to explain the major variations it displayed in the two settings selected for comparison.

10 The virtuoso complex compared

Only rarely do all the features essential to the virtuoso syndrome coalesce with enough strength to form a lasting and influential structure. In this chapter, I try to sum up the ideological and institutional conditions that have facilitated this unusual process of coalescence and institutionalization in the two settings examined here. Following the multidimensional approach defined earlier (see Chapter 2), the stress will be on the combined impact, in each setting, of religious-ideological premises, patterns of monastic institutionalization within and in relation to a specific macrosocietal context, and patterns of virtuoso radicalism.

The ideological premises

Religious virtuosity in the sense developed in the previous chapter can be expected to develop only on the basis of cultural orientations that encourage belief in the perfectability of man and allow for the possibility of voluntary and individual choice in committing oneself to the search for perfection. Moreover, it would seem especially apt to thrive and develop into a wider virtuoso–society complex when some of the commonly acknowledged, central cultural premises are fundamentally incompatible with the worldly concerns of ordinary life, thus demanding a level of commitment that cannot typically be expected from all. Although all ideals may be somewhat incompatible with day-to-day life, the incompatibility is undoubtedly made especially acute in the case of out- or otherworldly salvational orientations. The virtuoso complex will not develop, however, where otherworldly ideologies remain confined to small schools or ephemeral groups, but only in those very few and rare cases where otherworldly religious premises are combined with a universalist thrust and thereby come to be part of the cultural system of macrosocietal civilizational entities. In those cases, the complementary mechanisms of segregation and exchange associated with the virtuoso–society complex may be seen as mitigating the rift between those committing themselves to the enactment of unworldly premises and those unable or unwilling to do so – a specific instance of the more general problem of the internal heterogeneity of macrosocietal entities already mentioned.

The problems and paradoxes entailed in upholding otherworldly cultural premises on a macrosocietal scope were more especially acute, however (and hence more conducive to the development of the virtuoso–

society complex), in the case of Theravada Buddhism, often taken to be the otherworldly religion par excellence. Indeed, traditional Theravada Buddhism offers a fuller and historically more resilient expression of the ideal-typical virtuoso–society complex already delineated. However, most crucial from this point of view were not so much differences in degree of worldliness or otherworldliness, but rather in the pattern of relation between otherworldly and worldlier orientations that developed in the two cultural systems. Theravada Buddhism's dominant tendency – understood now as the outcome of a sustained historical process of ideological selection and retention – was to enshrine otherworldliness at the peak of a relatively stable and unidimensional hierarchy of symbolic orientations. This process of hierarchization had the effect of insulating the supreme otherworldly ideals from impingement by or intertwining with more worldly, lower orientations. Christianity, on the contrary, displayed stronger and increasing worldly orientations, and a strong interpenetration between otherworldly and worldly tendencies. Here too, significantly, hierarchization emerged as an important principle of cultural organization regulating the relation between alternative symbolic orientations. Nevertheless, although otherworldly ideals appear to have indeed governed the process of symbolic hierarchization for a while, they were never as safely insulated from a whole range of worldlier cultural orientations that themselves would in time develop into alternative, competing principles of symbolic hierarchization.

These differences are reflected in the monastic institution itself. In Christianity, the intertwining of otherworldliness and worldlier orientations seems to have made, logically enough, for a monasticism displaying a greater capacity for institution building in the here and now. Conversely, Theravada virtuosi, committed to more exclusively otherworldly ideals, have given rise to a loose form of institution, in line with the general indifference to and "weakness" in institution building commonly attributed to otherworldly religions.

Resorting to a simple otherworldly/worldly dichotomy, however, is not sufficient to account for what has been diagnosed here as a very strong and enduring pattern of institutionalization of virtuosity in the Buddhist context. This peculiar pattern of institutionalization is not to be seen as the result of either otherworldly or worldly orientations proper, but rather of what I called the worldly "facets" of Theravada Buddhism's essentially otherworldly soteriological message. What this nuanced if admittedly unwieldy formulation is meant to record is, if not a positive soteriological valuation of activity in this world, at least a sustained awareness of and interest in the worldly context in which the search for salvation necessarily begins and unfolds. The most important expression of this stance, in my view, was the doctrinal elaboration of a

very articulate and highly specified model of interaction between virtuosi and laymen, which played a decisive role in the incorporation of virtuosi within the wider social collective and in the "anchoring" of otherworldly ideals in the social here and now.

This model unequivocally buttressed the virtuoso's spiritual superiority, but also propounded a religious double standard investing the laity and worldly activity with a significant range of freedom and autonomy. Although insisting upon a clear-cut segregation of virtuosi and laity, it also kept them strongly interconnected and mutually dependent – a pattern in which the gift relationship played a central role. Unlike the Christian case, the doctrinal model did not elaborate explicit notions of reciprocal exchange and division of labor; nor did it propound any principles of religious authority or power in this world, either among virtuosi themselves or in their interaction with the laity, relying instead on the purely voluntary and formally unregulated participation of the two sides involved.

Religious ideology, monastic structures, and macrosocietal context in Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism's staunch renunciatory ideals were undoubtedly attenuated during its widespread diffusion and establishment in Southeast Asia. In the process, the Sangha became deeply embedded into its social environment as well as characterized by a low level of institutional autonomy. This so-called domestication of the Sangha also entailed the tendency for the Sangha to provide the laity with a variety of secular or magico-ritual services in tension with a stricter, more otherworldly definition of their virtuoso vocation. I have tried to show, however, that the basic segregative/interactive character of the relationship between virtuosi and laymen delineated at the doctrinal–ideological level, was in fact enforced and its scope of application even drastically expanded: First, it was effectively reproduced over large geographical areas in cellular, decentralized fashion, at the grass-roots village level; second, it came to apply at the polity's level as well, in the relationship between Sangha and king. In the process, the virtuoso–layman relation came to constitute a central axis of macrosocietal organization, cutting across regional differences, bridging center and periphery, and ending up forming the backbone of the interrelation of Buddhism and polity for Theravada countries.

Most striking for our own purposes, the strengthening and broadening of Theravada Buddhism's worldlier facets – sustained as it was, at least in part, by ideological developments of equivocal doctrinal status – never undermined the basic requisite for the virtuoso–society complex, namely, the very distinction between virtuosi and laymen, with the

double standard that this entailed. Neither did it challenge the classical hierarchy of ultimate values. In fact, the resilience of the virtuoso–society complex on the one hand, and of the hierarchy of symbolic orientations as dominated by the renunciatory, otherworldly ideology on the other, formed deeply interrelated and mutually sustaining historical phenomena.

The resulting congruence between the doctrinal–ideological model and its actual historical embodiment was further reinforced by some dominant institutional characteristics of the macrosocietal context. Of special importance in this regard was the decentralized, cellular character of the administrative–political environment, at both the organizational and symbolic level. Such a framework, most obviously, could not provide the Sangha with powerful models of centralized authority or organization. More important, neither kingship and center, nor secondary aristocratic elites, nor even any alternative religious specialists or intellectual elites appear to have mustered sufficient strength and autonomy to compete with the village Sangha for local resources and loyalty. Buddhist polities, however unstable and fluctuating, undoubtedly contributed a framework that was crucial to the historical resilience and expansion of the Sangha and themselves acquired, in time, a considerable ideological momentum. In the long run, however, the typical Buddhist polity seems to have built upon but never fully superseded the village monastery and its local lay audience as an ideologically self-sufficient civilizational unit. Last, but not least, socioeconomic conditions remained relatively constant; stated negatively, no pervasive socioeconomic changes emerged that might have shaken the material and ideological underpinnings of the classical Sangha–society relationship.

It would be difficult, and probably mistaken, to try and determine the causal relations between the virtuoso–society complex and these major characteristics of the macrosocietal context. A posteriori, at any rate, the "fit" or compatibility between them is rather impressive, and the Theravada sociopolitical environment seems to have provided a favorable context for the basic virtuoso–society structure of relations, facilitating its cultural centrality and historical resilence. On the other hand, the virtuoso–society complex itself, so solidly entrenched, could impose constraints upon and mold the course of developments in society at large. Whatever the ultimate basis of this syndrome and the nature of the forces that brought it into being and kept it going for centuries, it also acquired a structuring power of its own. As such, it seems very close to Anthony Giddens's notion of a "structural set": "a distinct clustering of transformation and mediation relations implied in the designation of structural principles, i.e., principles of organization of societal to-

talities."[1] I try in the next and concluding chapter to penetrate a bit deeper into the nature of the implied relations of mediation. My point for the moment is that the virtuoso complex is to be understood as a key formation in the historical settings discussed, shaped by but also shaping in turn significant economic, political, and cultural aspects of social behavior at large, facilitating certain developments and hampering others. Indeed, it is this development of the virtuoso–layman relation into a major axis of social organization capable of operating at both local and macrosocietal level that sustained the long-term endurance of monasticism as an essential component of the social structure at large in traditional Theravada Buddhist societies. In other words, we have here the rather paradoxical case of a monasticism maintaining the major "alternative," antistructural features essential to the monastic institution as explained in our previous chapter, but also coming to interweave and interlock with wider social frameworks in such a way as to constitute a dominant, even determinant feature of the social structure at large.

Virtuoso radicalism in the Theravada configuration

Even virtuoso radicalism, which might have been thought to pose (and to some extent did pose) a challenge to the established pattern of institutionalization and "domestication" of virtuosity, was not only contained within the bounds of this established pattern, but even acted at times in such a way as to reinforce and revitalize the whole configuration. On the one hand, radical renouncers striving for more extreme forms of withdrawal from the world undoubtedly challenged the established modus vivendi between Sangha and society; as has been noted, they also introduced a significant element of uncertainty into the gift relationship so essential to this modus vivendi. On the other hand, the ideology of outworldliness itself implied the existence of the always-legitimate option of retreating further from the social order and thereby recharging the virtuoso's charismatic potency, itself essential to the cultural viability of the virtuoso–society complex. The more radical renouncers, moreover, were far from constituting an altogether anarchic element; they did not necessarily strive for a clear-cut differentiation from the established, village Sangha. More important, they tended to become enmeshed with the political center and the latter's campaigns of purification. As a result, they may be

[1] A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press and B. Blackwell, 1984), pp. 185 ff. I allow myself to borrow the concept of structural set without necessarily endorsing Giddens's broader theory of structuration – a usage Giddens himself expected and encouraged. There have been in fact very few attempts to apply Giddens's highly theoretical concepts, even fewer regarding the analysis of premodern phenomena.

said to have contributed to revitalizing, reestablishing, or even disseminating the classical pattern of interaction between virtuosi and society rather than seeking structurally different arrangements. Most crucially, Theravada virtuoso radicalism never seems to have aimed, at least during the long period under study, at a total escape from the basic pattern of interaction with the laity, but only at minimizing it, voicing no principled opposition to the basic cleavage between virtuosi and laymen, and achieving no distinctive impact upon the laity.

It may be possible to further explain the historical resilience of the Theravada virtuoso–society complex by its very flexibility: As has been noted, it allowed for a largely tolerant stance vis-à-vis world and laity as well as heterogeneous "lower" cultural orientations – a feature enhanced by the absence of any mediating ecclesiastical institution or keeper of dogmatic orthodoxy. Moreover, it could be basically indifferent to and untouched by the vagaries and failures of the social order, which the virtuoso otherworldly ideology did not claim to model to begin with. Third, the ability of the virtuoso–society complex to function at both local and macrosocietal level, together with its typical village-based cellularity, endowed it with the lizard-like capacity, when impaired at one point or level, to survive or reform itself at another level. All this should not be taken to imply in any ways that the basic structure of the relations between virtuosi and society never broke down. The crucial point, rather, is that even if it did (as happened recurrently and most dramatically following wars and invasions), it re-emerged later with little modification, and that no alternative arrangement ever achieved a comparable social status.

Religious ideology, monastic structures, and macrosocietal context in medieval Catholicism

Within medieval Christianity, by contrast, developments at the ideological and institutional level interacted in such a way as to encourage the emergence of a variant of the virtuoso–society complex, but at the same time also prevent it from ever acquiring the cultural centrality and solid social anchorings it was able to achieve in the Theravada setting.

To begin with, the virtuoso–society complex had to rely on far less solid doctrinal and ideological groundings, *despite* the presence, from the outset, of strong virtuoso inclinations clearly encouraging the emergence of ascetic rigorism and perfectionism. Most crucial perhaps, these original virtuoso orientations were not endowed with a specific model of relation to the world, and retained a characteristic ideological open-endedness. Moreover, the multivocality of the Christian message itself, with its deep intertwining of otherworldliness and worldliness, further

contributed to the oscillation of the virtuoso impulse among various conflicting conceptions of the search for perfection.

The doctrinal model of relations between virtuosi and other Christians that developed in time displayed some critical differences from its Theravada equivalent. First, although also entailing, like the Theravada model, an element of segregation, it was more distinctly "transactional," based upon reciprocal and explicit exchange between virtuosi and others. Second, the traffic in symbolic and material resources was sustained by notions of a division of labor between the parties. Third, this division of labor was understood to take place within the bounds of what have been designated here as the Church's vertical and horizontal parameters: It was regulated, in the final instance, by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as well as founded upon holistic and organistic conceptions of the Christian collective. Such a model might seem to form, at first sight, an ideological edifice no weaker and perhaps even stronger than that obtaining in the Buddhist context. The crucial point, however, is that Christian monasticism developed a degree of organizational structure, overall institutional autonomy, political power, and cultural impact upon society at large too extensive and forceful to be effectively contained by mechanisms of segregation, division of labor, and exchange.

For a time though (roughly up to the eleventh century), Christian monasticism did maintain a network of interaction and exchange with society at large that superficially resembled the Theravada pattern, whatever the crucial differences in ideological underpinnings. Not unlike and in certain respects even more than the Sangha, it too became deeply "functionalized" (in the sense of being made useful for society at large and providing the laity with a broad range of religious and social services). Christian monks were on the whole less engaged in providing the laity with magical or magico-ritual services – probably reflecting the lesser tolerance of "high" Christianity in general with magical orientations seen as competing with its own scheme of (magico)-sacramental devices. Nevertheless, they too did intervene as specialists invested with some form of distinctive ritual capacity in one important sphere at least, that of relation to death and the dead. Moreover, Christian monasticism as well became at times heavily dependent upon lay patronage in general and the political center in particular. However, it also displayed a characteristic tendency to penetrate nonmonastic spheres of activity and a capacity to transform ascetic prestige into power in the world, which, together with the steady and increasing diffusion of virtuoso orientations into society at large, formed a sharp contrast with the Theravada situation. What thus obtained was a monastic institution that came to constitute much more of an "alternative" structure than in the Buddhist situation, standing in a relation of greater opposition and competition to

other institutional sectors – in part because also more similar to them in institutional structures and dynamics.

These characteristics of Christian monasticism may be attributed, at least in part, to the worldly strand ingrained within the ascetic tradition itself, as well as to the replication, within the monastic institution, of what I have designated as the horizontal and vertical principles of organization operative in the Church at large – all making for a greater potential in corporate strength and social involvement. They were also much facilitated by the special (if never exclusive) connection to the upper strata and aristocratic elites, enabling easy access to the centers of secular or ecclesiastical political power – in contrast to the dominant (if not exclusive either) Theravada pattern of grassroots embedment at the local village level. At any rate, these institutional characteristics of monasticism obviously enhanced its overall institutional and transactional power for a while. But they also helped blur the boundaries between the virtuoso sector and society at large in the long run, and as a result, defeated the possibility of a clear-cut segregation and division of labor between them. Paradoxically, thus, the very strength of Christian virtuosity's penetration of and impact upon society at large may be said to have contributed to the undermining of a separate virtuoso "alternative structure," and of the virtuoso–society complex of which that structure is a necessary element.

Moreover, the very fact that the relation between virtuosi and the others tended to be couched in a transactional, at times even quasi-commercial idiom, enhanced the element of precariousness intrinsic to the virtuoso–society complex in general. Being based on conditional, reciprocal exchange, it was automatically undermined by changes that affected the laity's interest in entering or maintaining the relationship – a fact that may explain its rapid erosion from the twelfth century on. The element of option on the laity's side had been present from the very beginning: Laymen could always content themselves with the soteriological intercession provided by the secular clergy, or even decide to do without any intercession or mediation at all – a recurring theme of medieval lay religious protest. However, it is mainly from the twelfth century on, in the wake of major institutional and ideological changes in society at large, that laymen started to withdraw from the relation of exchange with religious virtuosi, channeling whatever material surplus they had at their disposal in new directions. Whereas the segregative aspect of the relation between virtuosi and society became increasingly blurred, its transactional and thus essentially contingent aspect was, on the contrary, enhanced.

Although a number of features of the Christian ideological matrix contributed to these trends and developments, it is necessary to also

consider the impact of various characteristics of the macrosocietal context without which these trends might not have evolved. From this point of view, the distiguishing characteristic of medieval Christian society, relative to the Theravada Buddhist case, is the coexistence of multiple foci of authority, ecclesiastic and secular, competing and interfering in each other's domains of influence at the various levels of social organization (from the local to the national and the supranational), with only occasional periods of clear-cut division of labor and complementarity. In this, my analysis converges with other works in comparative historical sociology that have all emphasized, despite otherwise great differences in approach, the plurality of centers of power and/or authority as a distinguishing characteristic of the medieval West. These foci of political power and institutional authority, to begin with, provided monasticism with forceful exemplars of institutional formalization, legalistic and centralizing tendencies, and massive administrative structures, having no equivalent in the Theravada setting. Moreover, monasticism was caught up, as a result, in a shifting network of alliances between the various clerical and secular political forces; its symbolic status and prestige tended to fluctuate with the principles of social hierarchization favored by a specific balance of power.

The crucial point is that, although hierarchization was a pervasive device of organization in medieval society, it could evolve along a number of competing and potentially conflicting axes. Concomitantly, the various political forces were able, in alternation, to attain a high degree of ideological–symbolic autonomy. The greater ideological strength and autonomy of kingship and aristocracy, in particular, have been stressed, contrasting as they do with the relative weakness of their Buddhist equivalents and with their consequent relative ideological dependence upon the Sangha. Although the view that matters of perfection may determine the ultimate hierarchical position of human beings – placing monks and even hermits at the very apex of the hierarchical order – never vanished and was at times dominant, it was always in competition with other, equally influential models of hierarchization. This was a major factor hampering the consolidation of the virtuoso–society interaction into a major axis of social organization in the Theravada fashion.

Moreover, the overall ideological and institutional plurality of the Christian setting further enhanced the competitive, transactional, and thus ultimately contingent aspect of the relationship between virtuosi and their social environment. In sum, this relationship would never be able to reach the status of a central "structural set" in the sense already defined – although it may have seemed to approach that status from the seventh to the tenth century. The status it achieved was rather that, ultimately less central and less solidly entrenched, of what may be called

a principle of "structural alternation": a principle, that is, whose impact appears to lie in constituting one of a plurality of forcefully competing, interpenetrating, and historically alternating structural principles in the same societal entity.

It is important to stress that the greater (if always partial) similarity to the traditional Theravada Buddhist pattern that obtained in the earlier phase of medieval Christianity, running roughly from the sixth to the eleventh centuries, was also favored by a greater similarity in macrosocietal configuration at that stage. Not only did a mostly agrarian, subsistence-level economic structure with little economic surplus and fluidity of exchange prevail, but the Church was not yet so strong and centralized, no competing intellectual elites or institutions had yet come into being, and macrosocietal political frameworks themselves displayed much fluctuation in political power and centralization. Macrosocietal political frameworks, which had almost vanished with the dismantling of the Roman Empire, may be said to have regained strength under Charlemagne; but they were much weakened again by the end of the ninth century, when the Carolingian Empire was successfully challenged by other kingdoms. The consequent feudal decentralization or even atomization persisted until the reemergence of political centers in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in conflict with a Church itself considerably stronger and centralized.

On the other hand, the overall strengthening of both state and church apparatus coincided with the gradual decline in the scope and centrality of the virtuoso complex in the medieval West. This would seem to indicate that the virtuoso complex is apt to become an overarching generalized structure in agrarian societies where macrosocietal, state structures may be present, but rather weak or inefficient, and where the degree of cultural–ideological pluralization and elite differentiation is relatively limited. Again, the great turning point was the twelfth century, when the acceleration of a market economy, the burgeoning of national kingship and state, the overall strengthening of the secular clergy itself and of the Church's bureaucratic apparatus, and the emergence of new types of cultural–ideological elites and institutions greatly undermined virtuosi's power of survival as a separate sector within an increasingly differentiated and competitive ideological marketplace.

It should be emphasized, however, that the contingent, transactional nature of the interaction between virtuosi and society in general was enhanced not only by the increasing pluralization and "marketlike" character of the ideological and institutional macrosocietal context, but also by the very existence, at least up to the Great Schism, of a global and holistic conception of Christendom – perhaps providing the taken-for-granted, "precontractual" arena in which transactional market processes

could better develop: "Competition and contractual relationships fare best within an area of agreement and consensus."[2] Neither "state" nor "church" in their Theravada equivalents appear to have operated in such a global precontractual fashion.

The foregoing interpretation of the main institutional structures of the medieval West and of the place in it (and demise) of monasticism is rather consistent, by and large, with other extant macrosociological interpretations of that period of Western history. Where I would deviate, however, is in the interpretation of the church, in some of these works, as the equivalent of a powerful bureaucracy and state – or statelike – structure.[3] This difference may simply stem from the fact that I address myself to the earlier rather than later parts of the Middle Ages, where such a characterization is hardly applicable. Indeed, as already suggested, it is perhaps the relative weakness until the twelfth century of both secular and ecclesiastic "state" structures that allowed monastic structures and the attendant virtuoso complex to acquire such an important role, thus facilitating some important similarities with Theravada Southeast Asia.

Virtuoso radicalism in the Christian configuration

A number of developments in the virtuoso sector itself converged with the trends just described to further shake the foundations of the virtuoso–society complex as they obtained in the earlier stage. First, the virtuoso sector itself underwent increasing internal differentiation and polarization, much more so than in the Theravada case. Not only was the polarization between withdrawn and socially involved forms of virtuosity more pronounced, it also combined with a whole range of other ideological variations in an expanding spectrum of virtuoso options. This ideological plurality of the virtuoso sector led not only to institutional divisions within the monastic sector, but also to the emergence of new forms of virtuoso radicalism, overflowing the boundaries of monasticism itself (and even in some cases, of orthodoxy in general). The implications for the basic segregative/transactional mode of interaction between virtuosi and other social groups were momentous. In particular, both those forms of virtuoso radicalism striving at greater and even total withdrawal from the laity, and those striving, on the contrary, to intensify interaction with the laity, represented a deviation from the previous balance of segregation and exchange between monks and laymen. Even the eremitic strand reproduced the basic ideological and institutional

[2] Hall, "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism." A similar argument has been advanced in Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, chs. 10, 12 especially.

[3] See especially Collins, *Weberian Sociological Theory*.

features of the virtuoso "establishment" at large: the intertwining and tension between otherworldliness and worldliness, the impact of the vertical and horizontal principles, and the translatability of ascetic, outworldly prestige into power in the world – all ultimately inimical, as noted, to the maintenance of a pattern of clear-cut segregation between virtuosi and society. Moreover, the laity's increasing access to forms of religious virtuosity of its own further blurred the boundaries between the virtuoso and nonvirtuoso sectors and challenged the very plausibility of a differentiated virtuoso institution – a process that culminated with the Reformation. But perhaps most crucial, the existence of a broad spectrum of virtuosity further enhanced the elements of choice, competition, and transactional exchange that had already made the interaction between virtuosi and society characteristically precarious and contingent in the earlier medieval setting.

Summing up, we have thus reached a multidimensional analysis of the virtuoso complex, showing its precise development to be shaped by a constellation of ideological and institutional forces or variables. Although I believe that these variables were the most significant ones in shaping the historical trajectory of religious virtuosity in each civilization, I do not claim that the same variables should be invariably and automatically used in comparative macrosociological analysis more generally (of religious or any other type of phenomena). Neither should the interaction between them always be expected to be conceptualized in the same way – as one of overall mutual reinforcement. Religious–ideological orientations, to be sure, are given place of pride in my argument; but they are never considered independently of a whole range of other variables with which they powerfully interact. In the concluding chapter, I try to address the precise significance of religious–ideological orientations in the interaction between virtuoso elites and society, and thereby better define the sources and nature of virtuosity as a distinctive form of ideological power.

Conclusion
Religious virtuosity as ideological power: some implications for the comparative study of civilizations

Like any style or method of work, comparative macrosociology has distinctive strengths but also limitations. Following the development of a constellation of variables over many centuries and across civilizations makes it perhaps possible to highlight ideal-typical formations and broad structures, but does not claim to engage in the kind of rich and detailed analysis of more limited material – something akin to Geertz's programmatic call for "thick description" – better able to render the rich texture and "fine grain" of social life. Although this is true of any aspect of social life in general, I find the problem especially acute and challenging, for my own purposes, concerning the study of cultural orientations in particular. Stating the dilemma from the Weberian angle, the problem is how to conciliate the Weberian quintessential emphasis on the interpretation of meaning and the equally Weberian emphasis on the importance of multifactorial comparative sociological analysis.

The aim of the two preceding chapters was, first, to define the essential features of the virtuoso–society complex, and second, to identify the ideological and institutional forces shaping the expression of this complex in the two civilizations in which it achieved its fullest deployment. Having thus gone through rather "normal" motions of a comparative macroscopic analysis, I intend now to probe a bit further into the ideological appeal and symbolic meaning of virtuoso elites. More generally, I submit, the difficult issue of meaning cannot be simply brushed aside if one is aiming at a fuller understanding of the place of religious ideology and structures in the dynamics of macrosocietal, civilizational entities.

Recent macrocomparative treatments of these topics, in contrast, have tended to address religion not in terms of ideological contents and symbolic meaning, but rather in terms of the economic and institutional facets or solidarity functions of religious organizations.[1] Significantly,

[1] See the Introduction, fn. 4. See also Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book,* especially pp. 93–103. (Gellner, however, does otherwise give weight to ideological contents in other parts of this same work and objects to any principled theoretical stance on this matter.) The main functions referred to, typically, have to do either with some form of social control (such as socialization, the diffusion and regulation of literacy, the legitimization of power, or general enforcement of order) or with the contribution to some form of normative pacification and social solidarity. Despite the self-conscious refusal to submit religious substan-

however, such perspective has not necessarily denied, and in some cases has even contributed, to emphasizing the distinctive importance of religion in the comparative understanding of civilizational dynamics. Of special interest for our present purposes is the approach of Michael Mann: similarly bracketing out issues of ideological content or meaning, yet granting religion a large share of autonomy and the capacity to constitute a highly distinctive and influential source of ideological power. Although otherwise sharply opposed to what he defines as the more "conventional" style of comparative macrosociology to which the present book probably belongs, Mann's general emphasis on "networks of power" as the prime ingredients of his comparative world-historical approach is in fact rather compatible with my present emphasis on the virtuoso complex as a specific type of relational macrostructure.[2] More important, I find the notion of ideological power especially suggestive and relevant to what I have addressed, in the Introduction, as the capacity of virtuoso elites to achieve institutional strength and collective relevance – Nietzsche's contradictory "triumph." Yet the basis of religious ideological power, in Mann's perspective, is said to lie not so much in religious contents and beliefs, however genuinely adhered to, but rather in its capacity "to convert into a distinctive form of social organisation, pursuing a diversity of ends, 'secular' and 'material' (e.g. the legitimation of particular forms of authority) as well as those conventionally considered as religious or ideal (e.g. the search of meaning)."[3]

Understanding the social position of virtuoso elites in the medieval West and traditional Southeast Asia, however, may give us a unique opportunity to counteract these recent expressions of a "neomaterialist" interpretation of the role of religion in premodern macrosocietal entities. Monasticism and virtuoso elites, after all, are eminently and primarily ideological, or at least ideologically oriented phenomena; so is, at least in part, society's response and attitude to them. It is not my intent, however, to argue for a purely idealist interpretation of virtuosi and their relationship with society at large. Rather, it seems to me important to give their due to both ideological as well as institutional dynamics, and even more specifically, to the intricate intertwining and interpenetration of the two in the understanding of religious virtuosity as a specific form of ideological power.

tive contents, like any other variable, to systematic theoretical and comparative scrutiny, one does encounter in these works occasional and inconsistent references to the importance of religious doctrines and orientations, albeit again without admitting them any systematic theoretical status.

2 Although Michael Mann advances this conception in strident opposition to what he sees as flawed, conventional macrosociology, it could be shown that the gap is far from unbridgeable and somewhat an artifact of Mann's perception of "conventional" macrosociology.

3 Mann, *Source of Social Power*, p. 22.

The point is, indeed, that religious virtuosi in the two civilizational settings selected for comparison have given rise to an inextricable cluster of "symbolic-cum-organizational" processes in their historical interaction with society at large. On the one hand, virtuoso religion undoubtedly spawned a specific form of organization – monasticism. Furthermore, this organization often entailed the provision of a variety of "secular" services (educational, economic, and social) that account, at least in part, for its powerful position in these two settings. It is of course true that in both cases monasticism "provided not just soteriological subtleties, but concrete social services,"[4] all amply discussed in previous chapters of this volume. However, it is also true that soteriological subtleties were far from irrelevant for the sides involved, and were a necessary condition for whatever social services were provided. It is not the organized provision of social services, but rather the effective combination of the two aspects – soteriological and organizational – that underlies the social significance of the monastic elites in these two settings. The ability of monks to provide most of these services ultimately rested, for the laity, on their special prestige as carriers of specific cultural values and their theoretically withdrawn, "disinterested" asceticism. Overemphasis on social services could threaten monks' spiritual vocation, and consequently their soteriological functions for the laity (be it active intercession, as in the Christian case, or the more passive provision of a field of merit, as in the Buddhist case) – their major and prime service to society at large. In other words, there is a basic tension between the functional and ideological aspects of monasticism that, among other things, engendered much of the recurrent corruption-and-reform cycle in the history of monasticism in both settings.

Recognizing this tension is essential to the analysis of the ideological power of the virtuoso sector. To some extent, monasticism did give rise to a sort of "diffused power, spreading in a . . . spontaneous, unconscious, and decentered way throughout a population," of the kind associated by Mann with ideological power in its more "autonomous" configuration.[5] The appeal or influence displayed by virtuoso elites, however, cannot be fully captured by the notion of an ideological power relying either on its functional, "practical" bases or on a straightforward process of ideological diffusion and persuasion. What is involved, as repeatedly stressed in the previous chapters, is a more ambiguous and contradictory phenomenon, relying on a complex process of segregation and exchange in the mediation between virtuosi and society at large.

It may be useful at this point to turn again to Mauss's pioneering work on gift giving – a tradition of inquiry seldom made to encounter the

[4] Hall, *Powers and Liberties*, p. 74
[5] Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, p. 8.

comparative sociological one.[6] (Having already noted the need for a mutual fructification of the Weberian and Durkheimian approach to the study of religion, it is perhaps not incidental that it is to one of Durkheim's closest collaborators that we are now turning for additional insights.) To judge from the massive stream of donations received by monks, they obviously struck a chord among a laity willing to dispossess of a significant part of their material resources for the monks' material support. Far from being totally "disinterested" gifts, however, lay donations can be shown to make sense within the framework of certain ideological beliefs and to entail highly valued soteriological remuneration, such as an increased store of merit (for Buddhist laymen), or a better chance at salvation in the world to come (for Christians). It may also be tempting to interpret these donations as a tacit payment for the various social services already alluded to. Lying at the essence of gift giving, however, as recognized by Mauss, is precisely a distinct and delicate combination of "interestedness" and "disinterestedness," denying reciprocity yet constituting an important mechanism of solidarity in the long term.

Lay donations, in short, are not just a payment for monastic secular or religious services. Neither are they, however, equivalent to a straightforward commitment to the virtuoso ideals. A more adequate interpretation of donations, rather, is that they contribute to mediating between two otherwise polarized and even antagonistic sectors, between a religious elite exemplifying certain ideals, and lay believers willing to acknowledge the same ideals but unable or unwilling to commit themselves to their fullest enactment. The gift, in this case at least, is perhaps "total" (in Mauss's sense of being simultaneously economic, religious, political, etc.), but it is also, ideologically, a highly pliant and multivocal phenomenon.

It is useful, in this regard, to draw attention to the contradictory character of a gift relationship that undoubtedly testifies to the importance of otherworldly ideals, but also obviously gives tremendous importance to the proper circulation of material things in and of this world. After all, if worldly goods were not important, why should it be so important to get rid of them in the proper fashion and to the proper person? The significance of the virtuoso, from such a perspective, may be not so much, or not only his commitment to otherworldly ideals, but also his highly codified, "professional-like" way of life. At a time in

[6] See, however, for a suggestive example of encounter between Weberian and Maussian themes of inquiry, Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest;* J. Parry, "The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian' Gift," *Man* n.s. 21 (1986), 453–73. See also the monumental application of a historical sociological perspective to the study of "evergetic" giving in Greco-Roman antiquity in P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque: sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1976).

which neither market nor banking institutions in the modern sense were available, monasteries came to constitute the most reliable channels for the conservation, fructification, and display of wealth.[7] Paradoxically, it is precisely through what Peter Brown has aptly called his prolonged "rituals of dissociation" from the world and its ordinary web of social mutualities, and his resulting "professionalization" and "objectivity"[8] that the ascetic virtuoso may well offer the donor one of the most trustworthy, because most controlled and rationalized, ways of consuming his possessions and goods in this world. The trustworthiness is here further enhanced by the corporate continuity and (at least theoretically) inalienability of monastic wealth, by the fact that the receivers and receptacles of donations were monastic institutions ensuring a degree of continuity beyond the life span of individual virtuosi and of the donors themselves.

Although undoubtedly testifying to the appeal of otherworldly ideals,[9] the gift should thus also be seen as standing at the very nexus of otherworldliness and worldliness. Circulating things in this world, but also becoming quasi-thing-like itself in the process, the gift represents a sort of buffer zone in which the uneasy process of segregation and interaction between monk and layman, and between otherworldly and worldly, is thus regularly reenacted. It expresses the contradictory impulse to reaffirm the legitimacy of the average man's activity and wealth in the world while supporting a small elite withdrawn from the world, and to acknowledge the soteriological import of otherworldliness but also to negate or partly neutralize its impact.

The critical point is not only that the gift mediates between virtuosi and laymen, but also that it does so by coming "in place" of some other form of interaction for which it may be a substitute. What the religious gift of the kind discussed here would seem to connote and come in place of is not so much the possibility of conflict between donor and receiver – especially emphasized, for example, in Sahlins's reading of Mauss.[10] Rather, it is the oscillation between two possibilities no less threatening in nature: The first one is a polarization so deep and dichotomic that it may lead to total indifference or disconnection, that is, to the absence or dissolution of any sort of ties between renouncer and layman; the second one, at the opposite extreme, is a more involving, total form of commit-

[7] A similar function of donations to religious institutions in general is suggested by Ernst Gellner, who sees them mainly as a way of protecting surplus wealth from confiscation by eventual predators. See Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, p. 103.

[8] Brown, "Social Functions of the Holy Man."

[9] For a stress on the importance of otherworldly orientations for religious (especially charitable) giving, see Parry, "Gift." See however, a more nuanced analysis of the relation between Christianity in particular and charity (vs. other forms of giving), in Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, pp. 44–65.

[10] See M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972), pp. 169 ff.

ment, in the face of which the gift is a form of surrogate and compromise. It is, after all, undoubtedly easier to give a gift to a monastery than to surrender oneself to the monastic life. In this regard, therefore, the gift may be understood as a form of mediation between total disconnection and total commitment, and constitutes as much a way of establishing or reestablishing long-term solidarity as of testing or retesting options and boundaries.

It would be mistaken, however, to think that we have now exposed the one exhaustive and fundamental "meaning" of donations to the monks. As a matter of fact, the precise set and mix of motivations – conscious and unconscious, explicit and implicit – probably varied not only between the two settings examined, but even in each specific act of giftgiving.[11] A similar observation led Ernst Gellner to simply conclude that "when men perform acts which are part of their cultural repertoire, the ascribed motives come as part of a package deal, and need not be taken too seriously in any one individual case. . . . What does matter are the situational constraints which operate overall."[12] This, however, leaves unexplained what allowed these acts of donations to become such an ingrained part of the cultural repertoire – a question I believe can be answered only within the context of a more general understanding of the virtuoso–society complex and of the combination of ideological and institutional conditions affecting its deployment. But what Gellner's "situational" approach also overlooks is the distinctive operation of the gift as a mechanism of ideological mediation, relying, precisely, upon its pliable and multivocal character, its capacity to become the focal point or common locus of many possible types and layers of meaning, however differentially actualized in each discrete act of donation.[13]

If virtuoso elites did tend to generate a pattern of ideological power, therefore, it was one ridden – as all power perhaps – with basic tensions, ongoing instability and a fundamental ambivalence. Their ideological power is, to a very large extent, the power of ideology; but the power of ideology is itself, in this case, of a very specific and complex kind. In terms of our original comparison of virtuosity with charisma, here confirmed once again, the ideological power entailed does not call

[11] This is also why it may be not be helpful to lump together all forms of donations to religious institutions under one interpretation. Donations to priestly elites may well constitute a different pattern of giving than donations to virtuoso elites in the sense developed here.

[12] See Gellner, *Plow, Sword and Book*, p. 103.

[13] The high variability and plasticity of gifts' symbolic meaning across contexts and situations has been strongly emphasized in R. Firth, "Symbolism in Giving and Getting," in idem, *Symbols, Public and Private* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 368–402. I am adding here the possible element of symbolic pliancy and multivocalness even in one single act, type, and context of gift-giving.

for total identification and commitment but rather an ongoing balancing of identification and differentiation, internalization and externalization, closeness and distance.

Recognizing the intrinsic ambiguities and complexities of this major form of ideological power in the two great traditions examined implies acknowledging the capacity for tolerating and even actively nurturing ideological ambiguity as an essential rather than peripheral dimension in the analysis of both past and contemporary cultures.[14] Conversely, if a number of recent studies have tended to understate the role of ideological beliefs and contents in their analysis of the place of religious structures in macrosocietal formations, it is perhaps, at least in part, because they have assumed (like more traditional analyses of central value-systems before them) an overly monolithic and "cognitive rational" model of what ideological beliefs and orientations can be about.[15] Emphasizing both the presence of an inextricable cluster of ideological-cum-organizational dimensions and the ambiguous, dynamic nature of the ideological dimension itself in the interaction between virtuosi and society has certainly brought us, at any rate, a long way from any simple version, Durkheimian or otherwise, of virtuosi's "exemplary" ideological impact or symbolic "function."

A major aim of this study is to reassert the importance of relational structures in macrosocietal analysis – a style of interpretation usually giving priority to more obvious and "visible" organizational-institutional structures. This, however, should not lead us to reify such relational structures, nor to overrate their strength. The prominent position of religious elites and their general, macrosocietal significance as the acknowledged carriers of major religious ideals, were shown to be based, ultimately, on a voluntary and in many ways ambiguous and precarious process of interaction and exchange between these elites and their lay audiences. This, in turn, should instill in us a solid sociological respect for those (very few) cases in which these seemingly fluid and unsteady symbolic-ideological structures were successfully upheld over extensive stretches of time and space. Such exceptional endurance and scope can hardly be fitted into a static and passive conception of cultural continuity and tradition. Rather, it was shown to depend on the development of a

[14] For an important theoretical discussion of this general issue, see D. N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity: Essays in Social and Cultural Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), especially ch. 3.

[15] For a brief critique of conventional forms of value analysis, see J. C. Alexander and P. Smith, "The Discourse of American Civil Society: A New Proposal for Cultural Studies," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 2 (1993): 151–5 especially. From a very different angle, see A. Swidler, "Culture in Action." See also the critique of Western-biased notions of religious beliefs in Deborah E. Tooker, "Identity Systems of Highland Burma: Belief, *Akha zan* and a Critique of Interiorized Notions of Ethno-religious Identity," *Man* 27, no. 4 (1992): 799–820.

complex cluster of institutional and ideological processes allowing not only virtuosi, but also vast masses of average believers, to negotiate their relationship to otherworldly ideals hardly applicable to all.

To that extent, this analysis of the virtuoso complex certainly confirms the need to approach cultural values and value systems as "themselves the outcome of processes of defining what is valuable."[16] This process of defining the valuable, moreover, involves not only "the association of groups, conflict among groups, domination of some groups by others, and the settlement of conflicts among rival societal groups,"[17] but also, as I tried to demonstrate in a more detailed analysis of the gift relationship in particular, complex processes of symbolic mediation through a network of material and symbolic exchange. In this perspective, in fact, I hope not only to have contributed to the ongoing theoretical and empirical exploration of the mutual interrelations between micro- and macroprocesses, but also to have provided the example of a form of "traditional" process or mechanism capable of playing a privileged role in the mutual encounter and interconnection of micro and macro aspects of social life – and perhaps as a result, in the production and reproduction of certain sets of values and practices over vast expanses of social space and time.

Coming back to Weber, there is by now general agreement that he tended to underestimate the worldly, social potential of Buddhism, whether dated to the latter's origins or the result of a gradual accommodation with the world, and whether conceived as a "betrayal" of its original ideals or as a "genuine," straightforward development basically in line with its initial premises.[18] It is not incidental, in this regard, that his classical nomenclature of religious orientations is much more easily and readily applicable to Christianity, from which it obviously sprang, than to Buddhism, where I had to devise the (admittedly awkward) notion of "worldly facets of otherworldliness" in order to account for orientations that are not otherworldly, and yet neither affirmatively worldly in Weber's sense. What I hope to have demonstrated here, at any rate, is that Weber definitely underestimated the special kind of ideological and institutional capacity that Theravada Buddhism did evince in the process of upholding and diffusing its otherworldly premises across vast expanses of time, population, and territorial space.

It may still be basically true that an "essential peculiarity of Buddhism [is] the complete elimination of any form of inner-worldly motivation to

[16] See Munch and Smelser, "Relating the Micro and Macro," in Alexander et al. (eds.), *Micro–Macro Link*, p. 372.

[17] Ibid.

[18] See the Introduction, fn. 18.

conduct of a rational purpose in nature."[19] In line with Weber's own opposition to overdeterminism, however, it may be recalled that the history of religions is replete with unexpected twists of fate, unintended consequences of religious messages, or transformations of religious contents. The core of rationalization entailed in the systematic and disciplined search for salvation in Buddhism as in all "religious rationalization"[20] might well have expanded, intentionally or not, into other spheres of life. If it did not, or did so much less than in the Western setting, the explanation is perhaps to be found not, or not only, in its religious–ideological premises, but in a certain pattern of interaction between virtuosi and society at large – called here a virtuoso–society complex – that developed into a major and enduring axis of social organization, and as a result, also imposed very real constraints and limits on further ideological and institutional trends. These constraints and limits should not be assessed, however, in a purely negative way, as a sign of weakness or lack of institutional vigor. On the contrary, what deserves to be stressed much more than it has been until now, is the impressive diffusion and resilience of Theravada Buddhist outworldliness in the context of Southeast Asia, a resilience that cannot be understood as mere survival, but rather as the result of powerful supporting mechanisms. Not only are these mechanisms no weaker than those obtaining in Western civilization, but they may be seen, as perhaps stronger and more effective from the point of view of their capacity to secure lasting collective identification with outworldly ideals.

The resulting institutional capacity, as has been shown, has to be assessed according to different criteria of social significance and vitality than the more usual – because Western in origin – criteria of rationality, formal structuration, political power, or innovative potential. As for the admittedly greater efficiency and institutional capacity of Christian monasticism along those latter lines, they should be understood as deriving not, or not only, from an intrinsic tendency to rationality and/or worldly religious–cultural orientation, but also, and crucially so, from the interaction with a very different type of macrosocial context.[21] The importance of contextual structures was dramatically confirmed in the Western setting when a cluster of sweeping socioeconomic changes played a crucial part in deflecting the virtuoso impulse away from the monastic institution,

[19] Weber, *Religion of India*, p. 222.

[20] See S. Kalberg, *"The Rationalization of Action in Max Weber's Sociology of Religion,"* *Sociological Theory* 8, no. 1 (1990): 57–84.

[21] This is, of course, fully in line with Weber's analysis of the historical development of Western rationality in general (and capitalism in particular) in terms of a multidimensional combination of cultural orientations and institutional factors – as mostly evident in his *General Economic History*, last chapter especially.

"dispersing" it as it were into the lay sector, and thus eventually defeating the very principle of a neatly differentiated virtuoso sector.

From that point on, resistance to the separate existence of virtuoso elites has become an ingrained feature of the Western tradition. Undergoing momentous transformations throughout the later Middle Ages, the Reformation and the post-Reformation eras (and displaying to this day a rather surprising and paradoxical tenacity)[22] the virtuoso impulse in its more traditional ascetic–religious sense eventually lost much of its previous appeal and significance. Resistance to virtuosity could only be enhanced by the diffusion of modern democratic ideologies, theoretically hostile to the very principle of a hierarchical distinction between elites from the rest of society, and to the very idea of a normative double standard. Yet virtuosity itself, despite its connotations of elitism and double standard, did not altogether disappear from Western culture and the Western social landscape. In fact, it may be suggestive to extend the notion of virtuosity beyond the domain of traditional religions and into modern, secularized settings. As Guenther Roth once proposed, for example, it is possible to see certain kinds of secular revolutionaries or religious fundamentalists as modern examples of "ideological virtuosi" – marginal minorities characterized by an ethic of maximal commitment and single-minded conviction, with a largely indirect, exemplary influence on society at large.[23] In a more philosophical vein, one may also want to pursue the virtuoso motif in the theme – running from Nietzsche to Foucault's later writings – of the individual's disciplined self-transcendence and solitary labor in shaping himself into a "work of art."[24] Paradoxically enough, from such an angle, there may be some underlying similarity between religious forms of ascetic withdrawal and present forms of resistance to dominant cultural trends and social structures.

As repeatedly stressed in this book, however, the existence of individual virtuosi or even groups of virtuosi in a specific social setting does not necessarily mean the emergence of a broader virtuoso–society complex, that is, of a constellation of ideological and institutional structures regulating the relation between virtuosi and society. In newer and secular

22 I am thinking here not only of the survival of a broad range of Catholic religious orders, but also of the paradoxical emergence of monastic forms of life among contemporary Protestants. Traditional types of virtuosi also keep emerging, with even greater tenacity, from within the classical Asian traditions of religious asceticism.

23 Roth and Schluchter, *Max Weber's Vision of History*, pp. 144–162. Roth, however, follows Weber's rather loose definition of virtuosity and lack of conceptual distinction from charisma.

24 See the comparison of this theme in Nietzsche's work with Weber's conception of individual fulfillment in D. Owen, "Autonomy and 'Inner Distance': A Trace of Nietzsche in Weber," *History of the Human Sciences* 4 (1991): 79–92.

forms, and beyond the domain of modern political ideology, virtuosity survives now perhaps most clearly, if obviously with modifications, in the professions,[25] the arts and sciences, and in sports.[26] It is in these spheres that the individual search for perfection has remained a potent motif, together with elements of ascetic discipline as well as combined notions of distance from and exchange with a lay public audience. Modern forms of sponsoring and patronage in these various fields may even bear some similarity to the gift relationship that was an integral part of the more traditional virtuoso complex.[27] It remains to be seen, however, whether contemporary civilization will nurture enough of a sustained interest in the search for perfection on the one hand, and the mediation of ideological ambiguities on the other, to endow these possible fragments of newer virtuoso structures with a cultural resonance comparable to that achieved in the context of medieval Christendom and Southeast Asian Buddhism.

[25] See M. Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

[26] The theme of solitude and withdrawal has recently been shown to have served as a powerful metaphor in the early cultural construction of, and discourse about, the scientific endeavor. See S. Shapin, "Mind in its Own Place: Science and Solitude in Seventeenth-Century England," *Science in Context* 4 (1991): 191–18. Intriguingly related, see the analysis of the phenomenon of *prouesse* (prowess) – defined as "a conspicuous act by which an individual signals his success in reaching, within particular circumstances, the highest possible level of value achievement attainable by man" – in modern French culture, in Jesse R. Pitts, "Continuity and Change in Bourgeois France," in S. Hoffman (ed), *In Search of France* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964), reprinted in part in J. C. Alexander and S. Seidman, *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[27] "Philanthropic" sponsoring and patronage have only most recently started to attract their due attention in comparative historical sociology. See especially R. Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 279–88, and idem, *Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

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